"THE REVEREND ELDERS"

FAITH, FELLOWSHIP AND POLITICS IN THE MINISTERIAL COMMUNITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BAY, 1630--1710

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Preface

"If a man will begin with certainties he will end with doubts" observed Francis Bacon, "but if he will be content to begin with doubts he will end in certainties." Though not so optimistic as the redoubtable contemporary of John Winthrop and John Cotton, the present author can recommend The Reverend Elders to those who share Bacon's optimism, for this study was prompted by doubts about the traditional ways in which historians have seen fit to analyze the nature of New England congregationalism and the authority and influence of the Massachusetts Bay clergy. Insofar as the work has a peculiar perspective, it is this: The Reverend Elders is a study of the influence on theology, church discipline and colonial politics of an organized body of clergymen, a study which has been undertaken because historians, while traditionally concerned with the influence of a Puritan clergy in New England, have failed to consider the clergy as organized or to assess the implications of this organization for Bay institutions.

It is fashionable to refer to the Bay clergy as the priestly members of a theocracy and to characterize their influence as that of a ruling oligarchy. "Theocracy" is an uncomplimentary term and has usually been applied to the Bay clergy in an uncomplimentary manner. And, while the term might give us a shorthand description of a colony whose ministers and magistrates were dedicated to a religiously purified society, it tells us very little about the nature of that influence or how it was developed and applied. Indeed, there was no rule by priests in New England, nor did a close association between church and state create a situation amenable to a church-ruled state. And as there was no constitutional basis for a theocracy, the temper of the New England mind was unlike that fanaticism to be found in Calvin's Geneva or in a Münster ruled by radical sectarians. To call Massachusetts Bay a theocracy is to characterize the religious fervor of its inhabitants incorrectly and over-stylize the nature of its political structure.

Too frequently the term theocracy has been used inappropriately as a substitute for a detailed understanding of a clerical presence in New England based upon other than theocratic assumptions. The genius of the Bay clergy was its ability to transform a ministerial association into an institution invested with a charismatic authority. If there was little or no mention of theocracies in the colony, the colonists and the clergy did make frequent reference to a highly visible entity -- "The Reverend Elders" -- a group of ministers who, in gathering for frequent deliberations, developed a public sphere of influence in church and state. The Puritan's penchant for biblicism and his tendency to idealize biblical institutions meant that New Englanders were willing, in a certain sense, to accept a clerical influence as in many ways the equivalent of that authority exercised by elders in ancient Israel. It is in the nature of a charisma to be only so strong as the faith of those it influences. As men of God invested by biblical imagery with the authority to speak as the voice of God, the clergy were in a potentially unassailable position. But as congregational ministers whose opinions were only so authoritative as was their ability to persuade congregations to follow, the elders were also potentially vulnerable. Any assessment of the clerical presence in the Bay colony must take this fact into account. The clerical presence in the Bay colony was largely charismatic and unsupported by any legal sanctions inherent in the ministerial organization. Thus, a strong and forceful clergy was also potentially a weak clergy.

The nature of clerical influence in the Bay colony is to be found by analyzing the primary vehicle of that influence -- the ministerial meeting. This hypothesis, one no doubt unfamiliar to the student of American Puritanism, is based upon a detailed examination of the colony's public laws, its ministerial literature, and a number of printed and manuscript sources which deal with ministerial meetings, their functions and the practical results traceable to deliberations carried on by the gathered clergy. The author's analysis of this material has yielded information concerning one hundred and sixty meetings and permitted him to make a detailed reconstruction of the clergy's role in the day to day affairs of the churches and the colony.

The clergy developed their collective functions and accompanying influence on an ad hoc rather than upon any preconceived basis as the government and the churches called upon the ministers to deal with this or that problem. While this extemporized influence was not in direct contradiction to the broad tenets of Congregationalism, the role which the clergy played in the churches' affairs was nevertheless open to question. The clergy, for their part, found it necessary to reassess their collective position from time to time. A few opted for a formal, classical status not unlike that enjoyed by Presbyterian and Reformed ministers. The majority, however, were willing to understand a collectivized clergy as one expression of interchurch consociation which occurred periodically when the congregations found it necessary to resolve commom problems. Yet the congregations were suspicious of the ministers' motives even while making use of the collectivized clergy.

The existence of a ruling elite within a system of congregational churches makes it difficult to place the ministers and their congregations in a proper perspective. It is not possible, for example, to view New England congregationalism as a church system composed of independent congregations subject to no clerical hierarchy. One wades with care into the sea of ministerial literature and other public and private documents looking for a single, precise, or lasting formulation which will unlock the inner secrets of Bay congregationalism. The ministers differed among themselves when theorizing about the nature of church government in New England. Then too, "Congregationalism" was a popular ideology, a form of rhetoric applied by different factions within the churches doing battle for such and such an interpretation of the church. To view this diverse literature and the rhetoric as equivalent to a monolithic Congregationalism which was uniform in theory and standardized in application would be to deny what seems to be the genius of Bay congregationalism. It was in the very nature of the New England Way to deny a uniformity of opinion except when a particular ideal, promulgated by synodical decree or by some other instrument of consociation, was found suitable to the needs of the individual congregation. To distinguish the de facto church system in the colony from a theoretical Congregationalism of diverse proportions, the author has used the term the "New England Way." This has been done for one very important reason. It is only by reference to *de facto* congregationalism that one can include "The Reverend Elders" in an analysis of Congregationalism. An examination of the Cambridge Platform and of the ministerial literature concerned with a definition of Congregationalism will reveal little if anything about the clergy's association and precious little about the influence of the ministerial meeting on the Bay's churches. Thus, only by recognizing a *de facto* congregationalism which differed from its theoretical counterpart can we give the ministerial association its due share of attention.

The history of "The Reverend Elders" is a study of the New England Way, its institutions (most notably the congregation and the ministerial meeting) and the interplay between ideals and institutions as they worked their mutual influence on one another. Though written as a study in intellectual history, *The Reverend Elders* is also an attempt to analyze a social institution -- the ministerial association -- and to observe the interaction of the group and ideas as the clergy worked out their collective solutions to the colony's problems. For in the final analysis, this narrative history of the rise and fall of a cohesive clerical community in the Bay colony depends upon the fact that it was the need to define a uniform polity and to construct a viable theology for the Bay churches which led to the appearance of the collective clergy. Internal divisions in the ministerial community and laymen's hostility to ministerial ambitions, on the other hand, led not only to the elders' demise but to a fragmentation of the Congregational ideology as well.

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CONTENTS

Preface i

Prologue: "Matrix" 1

I. Preachers, Faith and Fellowship, 1600-1633 9

II. Transition: A "Modell of Church and Civil Power," 1630-1635 38

III. Faith, Orthodoxy and the Church Covenant, 1635-1645 65

IV. "The Reverend Elders:" The Ambiguity of the Organized Ministry in Massachusetts Bay, 1640-1648 103

V. "The Reverend Elders:" Scapegoats, 1648-1680 161

VI. Three Faces of Congregationalism 1680-1710 207

Epilogue: The Dilemma of the Christian Vigilante 241

Notes 246

Bibliographic Essay 275

Prologue: "Matrix"

Public buildings are raised when it is evident they will serve the collective needs and aspirations of a society. Aside from housing facilities useful to its occupants, the public edifice invests with prestige those occupants whose usefulness it publicly proclaims. In seventeenth century Massachusetts Bay, the public meeting house was one important edifice used by the town government and the local congregation. Less well known but equally important was the Boston Town House built in the 1650's to serve colonial Boston, the religious, political and economic center of Massachusetts Bay. Farmers from surrounding towns met beneath its eaves to conduct their business while above, in two rooms facing upon a public hall, the Bay ministers and the members of the General Court conducted religious and political business for the colony. The business of the General Court is self-evident, but the public significance of a gathered Congregational clergy is not so easily understood. If we are to believe the Boston merchant, Robert Keayne, whose will provided funds for erecting the Town House, the ministers were entitled to a meeting room, refreshments, and a library because they held frequent meetings "to confer about ordering things in the churches according to God and debate about doubts or difficult questions that may arise in matters of religion and such like."[1] The "Reverend Elders" merited public recognition, it would seem, because they served the religious needs of the churches much as the General Court served the political needs of scattered towns.

While facilities for magistrates and ministers seemed suited to the requirements of the colony, the encouragement given the "elite" elders was not without its misgivings. Keayne was ambivalent towards the elders though he recognized their utility, and found it necessary to warn them that his generosity would be continued by the executors of his estate only if the ministerial meeting "proves by experience to be much for the good and advantage of religion and the churches as is intended, and not to the hurt and prejudice of the same."[2] Keayne's conflicting feelings were generally shared by a populace which recognized that the gathered clergy was a necessary expedient in a colony of Congregational churches opposed in theory to a ministerial hierarchy. The ministers, for their part, shared the colony's uncertainties. In some respects they thought of themselves and their influence as different from the organization and authority of a presbytery or classis, though what they considered themselves was open to question. Some were of the opinion that the "assembly of ministers" was a "classis" in the tradition of the European Reformed churches or at least justified their existence in the only terms familiar to a clergy appreciative of Reformed polity and collectively dedicated to a reformation of the English church. Other clergymen, though equally dedicated to the Reformed tradition, would not go so far with the analogy because they feared for the future of congregations beholden to a clergy with classical pretensions.

It would be perverse to insist that the Bay ministers were Presbyterians under the skin and not concerned with the independency of the individual congregations which they served. One cannot read the early ministerial literature on the subject of church polity without coming away convinced that the early Bay clergy were opposed to coercive ecclesiastical authority and genuinely concerned with developing a form of polity which would accentuate the rights of the individual congregation. The individual church, they insisted, was a congregation of believers set apart from the world by their faith, a church which should elect and ordain its own ministers, conduct its own business and excommunicate whomever it pleased. Likewise they believed that no creeds or platforms should be imposed from without, buth they did assume that a collection of churches could establish doctrine by collective agreement which was valid when accepted by a vote of each church. The clergy had an abiding concern for the churches, taken collectively, as an expression of Christian unity. The ministers believed that the congregation's autonomous functions should be administered with an eye to the religious community-at-large, that if the functions were autonomous they should nevertheless be exercised identically by like-minded men in each and every congregation. Such "like-mindedness" could be achieved because issues debated and resolved in the ministerial meeting were introduced by the ministers into the churches where they served as the chief administrative officers. While the age demanded a marked degree of uniformity in religious matters, the Bay ministers and their congregations opposed the imposition of orthodoxy from above or from the outside. Thus, the elders served as an important agent of uniformity in the churches without resorting to the device of a coercive classis which violated congregational integrity. Yet the existence of this expedient organization, together with the ministers' close ties with the magistracy and its coercive authority, rendered ministerial meetings suspect and created ambivalent attitudes towards a gathered clergy.

Ambiguous but necessary--such were the features of a clerical authority inherent in a collective clergy which rose to prominence and influence because Massachusetts Bay, in its infancy, was subject to the diversity of opinion and concomitant dissension which could be expected in any society whose basic institutions such as church and state had to be developed almost from scratch. The elementary task of creating guidelines for developing congregations required that someone assume the responsibility. Encouraged by the magistracy, the ministers began gathering on a fortnightly basis in 1633 to debate pressing questions. These private conferences proceeded, by degrees, to create a public sphere of influence. The meetings proved successful and were eventually sanctioned by law while the collective clergy fastened itself in the public imagination as "the Reverend Elders." As this image of collective influence developed, the clergy's _ad_ _hoc_ functions assumed a more permanent form which Keayne described in his will as an "ordering" or administrative function and a "debating" or deliberative function. The Bay's clerical establishment was not classically derived but was indigenous to the circumstances of the colony. The elders were organized in a social rather than in a bureaucratic sense; they were a social group which met periodically to deliberate matters. When supported by the magistracy or when their own prestige sufficed, they could focus their influence with a Presbyterian strength though they thought of themselves as something quite different from Presbyterians.

What those differences amounted to in terms of a detailed polity were, however, a matter of debate. When the ministers set foot upon

American soil they were in a truly creative position for they had the opportunity to build an ecclesiastical system where there was none. William Hubbard, a near contemporary of the early clergy, captured the spirit of the times when he argued that the early ministers "were honest minded men, studious of reformation" who had no master plan for the organization of the congregations but were like "_rasa_ _tabula_ fit to receive any impression that could be delineated out of the word of God." The "word", of course, was not read in vacuum, but interpreted in the light of English Puritanism. New England's ministry sought to reform the English church by creating a more perfect ecclesiastical system, turning for inspiration, Hubbard insisted, to the "old nonconformists and good old puritans of queen Elizabeth and king James", divines such as Robert Parker, William Ames and Thomas Cartwright.[3] The works of these influential Puritans have been artfully divided by historians for convenient analysis. Thus William Ames and Robert Parker spoke for "nonseparating Congregationalists," while the works of Thomas Cartwright laid the foundations of English Presbyterianism. These distinctions have their merits, for by the use of conventions such as "nonseparating Congregationalism" the New England Way can be identified as the progressive refinement of a model church polity which is to be traced to a distinctive sub-group of nonconforming divines particularly concerned with the integrity of the English parish -- Ames, Parker, Paul Baynes, William Bradshaw, John Cotton, John Davenport, Hugh Peter and Thomas Hooker.[4]

Nevertheless, the transformation of English nonconformity into a viable ecclesiastical system for the Bay colony was more difficult than some historians would have us believe, for a diverse clergy with ambiguous but ambitious collective pretensions existed as an important intervening variable. That ambiguity was due in no small part to the fact that clerical pretensions in New England and the English tradition of ministerial association which spawned "the Reverend Elders" were intertwined with Reformed doctrine and Presbyterian polity as first imprinted upon the Puritan mind by Cartwright. Moreover, the ministers were in some disagreement concerning both general precepts and the administration of particulars in the congregations. What seemed appropriate for the English parish was not always to prove advantageous for an American congregation. The Puritan faith was an emotional phenomenon only partially defined or directed by theological terminology. It was a dynamic force which could divide as well as unite congregations and communities. In coming to an understanding of "faith" and its relationship to the life of the churches the very fact that the clergy tried to think as a group but could not agree on such matters was to have an important effect on church discipline and theology in the churches. While the ministerial literature can be made to yield a fairly cohesive point of view (as Perry Miller has ably demonstrated) and therefore a set of ideals which motivated the ministers, there were also basic contradictions in that literature which help to explain clerical motivations. As human beings, the ministers faced dilemmas of their own making as a result of these contradictions, dilemmas which were as characteristic of congregationalism as the pattern of ideals unique to that polity. How the dilemmas were resolved or why they went unresolved markedly affected the clergy's outlook and actions. Group dynamics played an important part in defining the New England Way. Differences of opinion among the clergy were, at first, seldom so great as to paralyze collective clerical action, for the ministers strived for consensus and, when that could not always be achieved, they sought to accomodate personal differences for the sake of what they called "unity and verity." When the ministers could agree, basic assumptions were to have a marked influence on the nature of Bay congregationalism. While in an accomodation of their differences clerical consensus lost a clarity of detail, it gained strength from a commonly held if necessarily generalized point of view. Outright divisions, however, meant a fragmentation of opinion and a competition of ideas in the ministerial community and therefore within the churches. Thus concensus and accomodation among the ministers affected the manner in which the New England Way was defined as well as the degree to which that Way could be given a detailed definition. Dissension, contributing as it did to a diversity of opinion in the congregations, had the effect of delimiting those institutions and ideals which, taken collectively, constituted "orthodoxy" in the Bay colony.

In a word, "the Reverend Elders" when united or divided were an important matrix of the New England Way. Thus, it was as nonconforming ministers with individual differences who were intent upon establishing a common point of view that the Bay clergy initially met for deliberations soon after the colony was settled. If the elders were not certain about the future course which their congregations should follow, the past was spread before them for consideration. The ministers who met to apply the past to the future, despite their personal differences, shared common assumptions and experiences which they intended to implement in the Bay congregations. To understand this clerical matrix, one need only give a cursory glance at the ministers' collective biographies to discover a typical profile. To a man they were English preachers and as preachers the ministers had a common set of values developed while serving as pastors in their English parishes.

I

Preachers, Faith, and Fellowship, 1600--1633

There is a special place in the pantheon of English reformers for the nonconformist preacher who is recognized as the primary source of that dynamic Christian faith which was the heart of English Puritanism. In the short space of thirty or forty years before English Puritans beheaded their king and his archbishop, the English preachers came into their own and developed a style of religious life which they deemed essential to a purification of the English church. These ministers and divines stressed the spiritual regeneration of the individual and saw the fellowship of regenerate believers as the instrument of purification in the English parish. Earnest Christians, they thought, could find strength to test the quality of their faith in the spiritual struggles shared with others. For their own part, the clergymen found a similar fellowship among themselves when gathered together for prayer and consultation. The preachers developed a program which stressed the interdependence of faith and fellowship in parish worship and in ministerial association. A younger generation of ministers coming to maturity in the reign of the early Stuarts took upon themselves this particular form of Puritanism, and when they fled Archbishop Laud's High Commission, they carried it with them to New England.

As a group, the preachers' primary concern was the promotion of effective preaching and pastoral ministration in the English parish. Through private conferences, by encouraging the publication of sermons and tracts, in writing a laudatory preface to a colleague's work, what William Haller has most appropriately called a "spiritual brotherhood" of preachers, fostered a practical theology dedicated to the cure of souls. Among the leading members of the group, Arthur Hildersham and John Dod stand pre-eminent. The rank and file were influenced also by Laurence Chaderton, master of that Puritan nursery, Emmanuel College at Cambridge, the university in which the brotherhood found its chief theologians, William Perkins and his pupil, William Ames. The genealogy of the brotherhood of preachers reads like Genesis 10 where it is recorded that generation begat generation in the service of God. Dod numbered among his confidants young men and future New Englanders like John Davenport and Richard Hooker. Hildersham, meanwhile, included John Preston and John Cotton among his disciples. Yet another influential divine was Richard Rogers, father of Ezekiel and cousin of Nathaniel Rogers (two more future Bay ministers). Rogers was a teacher to Paul Baynes and that preacher who converted Richard Sibbes. It was Sibbes whose sermon first pricked the young conscience of John Cotton. And it was Cotton who brought Preston, another powerful preacher, to Cotton's door to admit that "it had pleased God to speak effectually unto his heart" through a Cotton sermon. Preston's fervor, in turn, made an initial impression on the conscience of Thomas Shepard, destined to become one of the Bay's most existential preachers. George Phillips, one of the ministers who accompanied the Winthrop fleet to New England in 1630 was a protege of John Rogers, yet another powerful preacher in the Rogers' clan and a man whose sermons were famous for the trembling and sudden conversion which they wrought. Still another family of ministers who were numbered in the brotherhood was that of John Ward, an active preacher and reformer. Ward's son Samuel helped edit the works of Perkins while Samuel's brother Nathaniel carried the family tradition to Ipswich in New England.[1]

In certain areas, the preachers found it expedient to join together in ministerial associations to promote their work further. John Cotton provided one focal point for such a group. Cambridge dons frequently traveled to old Boston for conferences and to hear the vicar's famous sermons. In addition, Cotton associated with a number of neighborhood clergymen residing in eastern Lincolnshire. Correspondence between Cotton (after he removed to New England) and his old colleagues suggests that Cotton was one but recently a part of their collective deliberations. William Bourne, writing to Cotton in 1637, revealed the effect of the association on its members: "Whilst wee lived together in the same kingdon wee professed the same faith, joyned in the same ordenances, laboured in the work of God to gaine soules unto his Kingdome, and maintained that purity of Gods worship against corruption, both on the right hand and on the left."[2] The group included Simeon Ash, a prominent exponent of William Ames' theology (like Cotton), John Ball and John Dod. The nature of this association in East Anglia was described by Ball's biographer who noted that his subject "was particularly concerned for the prosperity of Zion, and deeply impressed with the lamentable evils of the times," and therefore "frequently united with his brethren in the observance of fasting and praying."[3] The Cotton-Ball-Dod-Ash group was no doubt much like a similar collection of ministers gathered about Arthur Hildersham, a personal friend of Cotton. Hildersham was a chief promoter of ministerial association in Derbyshire, Staffordshire and Lincoln. "These Associations" his biographer observed "were designed for private conference among the ministers, and the public ministry of the word. They were the means of unspeakable good to both ministers and people."[4] One such association, for example, to be found in the vicinity of Ashby-de-la-Zouche, Hildersham's parish, included the author of the Independent tract, English Puritanism, William Bradshaw. This particular association made it possible for the area ministers to participate in "religious conferences among themselves. For their mutual advantage, they proposed subjects for discussion; when Mr. Bradshaw is said to have discovered a depth of judgment, and a power of balancing points of controversy, superior to the rest of his brethren."

The experience of ministerial association was common among future Bay divines. Cotton no doubt numbered among his associates Samuel Whiting who ministered in an adjoining parish and quite possibly Samuel Skelton living in nearby Holland, Lincolnshire.[6] At least four and possibly five more future Bay ministers were active in two other associations. Richard Mather was in similar circumstances to those of Cotton, having developed sufficiently strong ties with neighboring clergy to warrant correspondence with his colleagues after he migrated to the New World.[7] Thomas Hooker organized a very important association in his neighborhood of Chelmsford. The less experienced ministers had "recourse unto him, to be directed and resolved in their difficult cases; and it was by his means that those godly ministers held their monthly meetings, for fasting, and prayer, and profitable conferences." A jealous vicar gave unwitting testimony to the efficacy of these conferences when he insisted that the associated ministers "preach what he [Hooker] had brewed." John Eliot, the usher at Hooker's local school, may well have been on the periphery of the group. Thomas Weld, the vicar of Terling was a regular participant, while it was the association of preachers who "called out" Thomas Shepard to serve the lectureship at nearby Earles-Colne.[8]

One can easily imagine it was in such meetings that theological tracts and Puritan broadsides such as Bradshaw's English Puritanism were discussed. A close association between Hugh Peter, John Davenport, Richard Sibbes and other London ministers who seem to have kept fairly regular company no doubt was responsible for Peter's and Davenport's early espousal of William Ames' view of the Reformed church. As we shall see, Cotton's opinions and his reading of Ames reflected the outlook of his immediate colleagues in East Anglia. It was to his associates that Richard Mather turned before migrating to New England and it may well have been members of that group who introduced Mather to the works of the Puritan reformers which he studied while under censure for nonconformity.[9]

While it is apparent that the ministerial associations gave considerable cohesion to the spiritual brotherhood and helped mold opinions among the preachers, the extent to which they were intended as formal instruments of purification or as approximations of Reformed classes of ministers organized within the church is a moot question but one nevertheless fascinating to contemplate. The ministerial associations in which future Bay ministers participated were not isolated phenomenon but examples of an endemic associationalism indigenous to the English church, the roots of which were intertwined with the Reformed tradition to be found among English Puritans and Scottish Presbyterians. Associations of neighborhood ministers and lay elders were a functional part of Scottish Presbyterianism during the 1570's before formal presbyteries of Scottish ministers were organized to govern the kirk.[10] Across the border in Elizabeth's England, Dod, Hildersham, Richard Rogers, John Ward and William Perkins were among those associated with William Cartwright in an attempt to organize associations of English ministers into cladestine Presbyterian classes within the English church.[11] Cartwright's objective was to formalize and make consciously "presbyterian" a number of ministerial associations which had been organized (with the assent of Elizabeth's bishops) for self-edification and as a means of improving the average parish pastor's preaching abilities. The mainspring of the association was a "prophesying," a combination public forum and ministerial meeting in which a minister delivered a sermon for the instruction of gathered parishioners that his talents might be better assessed by his colleagues.[12]

While this "Classis Movement" was uncovered by the authorities and the classes dissolved, it would seem that Cartwright's friends like Hildersham and Dod, continued to organize groups of ministers in the belief that conferences helped the preachers' cause. By contrast to the earlier associations, these subsequent associations were primarily interested in improved preaching and theological debates while the reform of polity and liturgy seem to have been held in abeyance. But the spirit of Cartwright lived on among the preachers and the seeds of Reformed thought which he helped plant lay dormant until they came to fruition with the revolution and the Westminister assembly. Yet, it would be in error to think that associationalism in the English church was the exclusive property of presbyterians, for while the presbyterians of Cartwright's era were members of associations, not all of the Reformed-minded associationalists of subsequent generations were presbyterians.

Endemic associationalism in the English church was thus the broader of the two traditions among English Puritans. In his Book of Discipline (1584) Cartwright proposed a presbyterian organization of the English church in which the local parish would be ruled by the local "seignory" or presbytery of elected ministers--a teaching and a preaching minister--together with a ruling or lay elder; the national church would be controlled by a hierarchy of ministers which at the neighborhood level would consist of a "conference" of ministers gathered from twelve adjacent churches. How much "presbyterianism" was indigenous to clerical association can be seen in Cartwright's description of the ministerial conference or classis. "A conference I call the meeting of some certaine ministers and other brethren ... to confer and exercise themselves in prophesying or in interpreting the scriptures.... At which conferences any of the brethren are at the order of the whole, to be employed upon some affaires of the church."[13] Cartwright hoped to establish a fairly authoritarian hierarchy of ministers to rule by conferences or classes, provincial and national assemblies, a scheme which the preachers of the Westminister assembly and committed Presbyterians in New England were to favor.

But such was the relationship between associationalism and Reformed thought that other divines could interpret the relationship in differing ways. Robert Brown, the separatist, could insist, for example that certain "teaching and guiding" officers should have charge over "manie churches" or separatist congregations. Brown reflected the voluntaristic side of the Classis movement when he insisted that weaker congregations should look to stronger congregations for the redress of problems by recourse to synods.[14]

As we shall presently see, William Ames developed another important variation of synodical discipline which had a particular appeal to certain of the preachers who migrated to New England. Yet another variation of associationalism and Reformed thought is to be found in the life and work of Richard Baxter, an important figure during the Commonwealth period. The young Baxter was introduced to nonconformity and its literature through frequent "conferences" with a group of nonconforming ministers. Throughout the early part of his ministerial career, Baxter was involved in what seems to have been a fairly active association of neighboring clergymen. The ministers residing around Baxter's Bridgenorth were accustomed to debating pressing questions and were sufficiently concerned on the occasion in 1640 when Charles I presented the infamous "et cetra" oath to seek a united front through deliberations. They gathered "to debate this Business that they might have no Division" in their opposition to an oath which would have bound them to preserve episcopal government in a church which many of them sought to reform. Baxter, moreover, if we are to believe his own account of events subsequent to this occasion, was responsible for establishing numerous associations of ministers during the

Commonwealth period, that the English clergy might bring a measure of uniformity in doctrine and discipline to English parishes no longer subject to the authority of defunct dioceses.[15]

It is in Baxter's approach and in the outlook of those ministers with whom he associated that one finds articulated the ambiguous intertwined relationship between associationalism and Reformed thought. Like Baxter these ministers (who Baxter insisted constituted a majority of the English clergy) were what he called "disengaged," for they held no particular allegiance to any doctrinaire platform of reform. Neither Presbyterian nor Independent, many of these ministers were what one recent student of the period has called "Presbyterian Independents" because of their rather eclectic interpretation of the Reformed tradition. Baxter, for example, "saw in Scripture, Antiquity and reason, that the Association of Pastors and Churches for Agreement, and ... Synods in Cases of Necessity, are a plain duty: and that ... ordinary stated Synods are usually very convenient." The sort of half-parish, half-Reformed discipline exercised by the associated ministers over their parishes represented for Baxter a "Church Order and Discipline, as the Episcopal, Presbyterian and Independent are agreed in, as belonging to the Pastors of each particular church."[16]

In sum, the organization of ministerial associations among the preachers after the Classis movement was not due to happenstance. Though established by presbyterian friends of Cartwright, the associations, like the concept of ministerial association itself, was not dependent upon a presbyterian ideology for its existence. If the tradition of ministerial associations had its roots (as Baxter suggested) in the ideals of many churchman, Presbyterians and Independents, its basic source of nourishment was no doubt the Reformed belief that a certain degree of ecclesiastical authority and influence was inherent in a gathering of pastors and preachers.[17] Such was the milieu in which the preachers' associations were established which eventually gave rise not only to Presbyterian classes but to associations of pastors in England and to the Reverend Elders.

If the preachers' associations had a Puritan bias in their attachment to a reformation of the English church and as the heirs of the Cartwright discipline, their interest in parish administration marked them as part of a more general movement within the English church dedicated to improving the parishes, a movement that numbered among its leaders Lancelot Andrew, Bishop of Winchester, and the poet-pastor, George Herbert.[18] Theologically, the movement was fragmented over the proposition of predestination. While some churchmen favored an essentially free-will interpretation of human salvation, others, including most of the preachers in the associations, joined ranks with William Perkins in stressing the omnipotence of God, the depravity of man, and the necessity of election.

In Perkins the preachers had a theologian who, while at Cambridge, had developed a practical divinity meant to improve the faith of those weak and troubled Christians inhabiting the local parish. Perkins was at his best as a simplifier and popularizer who likened faith to a grain of mustard seed planted in men (the act of election) by the grace of God. A germ of spiritual life (expressed in the homely metaphor familiar to the inhabitant of rural England), the mustard seed was to be nurtured until it had grown to maturity in a sanctified life of Christian piety, a life that would be a testimony to the initial act of election whereby God had justified man by giving him faith. It was Perkins' fond hope that through his efforts the average church member could "dilligently try and examine himself whether he be in a state of damnation or a state of grace."[19]

If this essentially Calvinistic doctrine was intended to glorify a God who, in His omniscience, knew that some men would be saved and some damned, it was by no means meant to discourage those of weak faith who searched for their election. Since faith in the regenerate was considered a sign of his election, the preachers took a special interest in the anatomy of faith. Building a schema applicable in the parish, the ministers dwelt upon the progressive regeneration of the reprobate. Man, they preached, developed his faith as he experienced the several stages of regeneration -- election, vocation, justification, sanctification and glorification -- stages by which he passed from a sinful state to a life of mature faith.[20] Employing a terminology meaningful to the human condition, regeneration was frequently spoken of as "conversion" and understood as a psychological metamorphosis. Beginning in a state of doubt, the reprobate was converted to a state of certitude as his election became increasingly self-evident. That self-evidence, the most sought after state of mind in English Christendom, had its special theology and was known by the descriptive title "assurance."

The preachers attempted to isolate man's election by improving his assurance, seeking to alleviate his doubts and fits of melancholy by various techniques.[21] A mercurial faith could make the Christian's life a nightmare of fear and trembling. When wrapped in the anguish of his spiritual failures, the would-be convert was expected to take stock of his shortcomings. George Herbert recommended introspection:

> Summe up at night what thou hast done by day:
> And in the morning what thou hast to do.
> Dresse and undress thy soule: mark thy decay
> And growth of it; if with thy watch, that too
> Be down; then winde up both.[22]

The diary, too, served as a confessional and was at once a means of psychological relief and a clinical instrument intended to isolate a certain faith in the deeds preformed in an uncertain world. The diary built up the courage and self-respect of the individual. If Richard Rogers found assurance in his spiritual diary, Richard Baxter gained a knowledge of God's grace by reading the spiritual tracts of the preachers, a practice which he considered as important for his faith as the workings of the Holy Spirit and the "preaching of the Word." Fears and doubts as well as those more acute depressions of a religious mind known to the period as "melancholy" were prominent features of the religious life in Jacobean England. Clergymen were preoccupied with assurance and the psychology of conversion to such an extent that the parish minister emerged during this period as an amateur psychiatrist and assumed a counseling function which became a hallmark of the English ministry in seventeenth century England and New England.[23]

Counseling and the sermon became chief tools of the preacher's trade. The Rogers-Sibbes-Cotton-Preston-Shepard chain of conversions began with an incisive sermon which cut through the protective layers of the listener's conscience and continued with a personal conference between preacher and listener. The minister was a patient and sympathetic counselor for, if he ran true to form, he himself had recurring doubts about his election and probably could trace his commitment to the ministry to that first prick of an awakened conscience. As physicians of the soul, the preachers' own spiritual health was a testament to their healing art though even the physician was subject to the diseases which he treated. Ezekiel Rogers, writing to an anxious Lady Johan Barrington, observed that "for the matter of Assurance [the Lord] ... hath not dealt so largely with you." Rogers wrote of her excessive doubts and fears as a "disease" and recommended a "Remedy." The lady must analyze all of her "walking and faylings" which, in time, should yield up a catalogue of those promises of salvation and evidences of God's extended grace experienced in her daily life.[24]

The quest for assurance was, in the final analysis, a personal quest. The preachers stressed the "experimental" quality of faith, for faith was considered the net result of a personal experience of conversion. Though considered in part as the effect of an assurance grounded in self-knowledge, the preachers thought faith also established by spiritual inspiration to be found through scripture reading, conferences, prophesyings and "telling experiences."[25] Thus what Geoffrey Nuttal has called the "doctrine of the Holy Spirit" played a sentinel role in directing the Christian's quest for assurance in Puritan England. Prone to minimize the efficacy of ceremonies and the sacraments, many preachers stressed, instead, the immediate working of the Holy Spirit upon the person in the throes of conversion. Scripture was considered a primary agent of spiritual grace and its inspired reading by the Christian, the effect of God's spirit working in man. Richard Sibbes, for example, insisted that "God, joining with the soule and spirit of a man whom he intends to convert, besides that inbred light that is in the soul, causeth him to see a divine majesty shining forth in the Scriptures, so that there must be an infused establishing by the Spirit to settle the word of God.... so the Spirit of God goes along with the word and makes it work."[26] Characteristically, John Goodwin considered prophesying "the opening and interpreting the word of God by a proper gift of the Spirit." Likewise, preaching by ministers to earnest Christians and discussion among questing saints were also considered channels of spiritual grace. While conservative divines such as Goodwin, Richard Baxter and Sibbes would not go so far as the Quakers in the latters' insistent belief that the spirit spoke directly to men without benefit of scripture, the fact that both preachers and Quakers stressed the importance of the Spirit's work in the processes of conversion suggests the extent to which a sense of personal communion with God through the Spirit was characteristic of assurance in Puritan England. Thus, if despondancy was a sign of spiritual sickness, inspiration by means of the Holy Spirit represented that opposite psychological state deemed desirable in the process of conversion.[27]

Among the preachers, Richard Sibbes was most instrumental in promoting the idea of inspiration in his version of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The extent to which the Spirit worked upon the mind, that is the extent to which conversion was considered as a rational understanding of experience was in some dispute among the preachers. While John Preston insisted that "conversion is not prostration on the road to Damascus, but reason elevated" Sibbes wondered about the extent to which conversion was affected by pure reason. "How do you know the word to be the word?" he asked. "It is an evidence that the fire is hot to them that feeleth it, and that the sun shineth to him that looks on it; how much more doth the word.... I am sure I felt it, it warmed my heart, and converted me." (Nuttal quoting Preston and Sibbes, 36, 39).[28]

Answers to such questions varied with the minister. John Cotton who converted Preston and was converted by Sibbes laid more stress on emotions and was less willing to trust pure reason than Sibbes or Preston. The epitomie of the godly preacher and parish pastor, Cotton served his parish at St. Botolph's, Boston, in a variety of ways -- counseling, cathechizing and preaching -- all of which were directed to an elucidiation of inspiration. The Boston vicar preached as if to ensure a spiritual crisis in his listerers, no doubt because of his own want of internal peace" and his "continual exercise, [proceeding] from his internal temptations and afflictions." Cotton tried, in his sermons, to unmask hypocrisy, cautioning his parishioners never to rest "in any measures of grace whatsoever they bee, untill God have the heart, till our wils receive and imbrace him, and so open to him, that hee may come in conquering to conquer, and in subduing to subdue." The Boston preacher emphasized the part played by the emotions in conversion. Grace, he informed his listeners, may initially be nurtured by listening to sermons, in prayer and in conference. But final assurance would come as a cataclysmic force and it would arrive "when the light of the Gospel shines cleerly, and the Sonne of Righteousness arises with healing in his wings, and flares into our minds and consciences, and will not suffer us to sleepe, but will so forceably enter in, that wee cannot but see and heare and bee converted."[29]

The search for faith was a grim business, and the earnest Christian turned to the fellowship of earnest seekers if only because misery loves company. John Winthrop, lord of Groton manor, in recording his personal quest for assurance, found that he "loved a Christian, and the very ground he went upon"; when searching for signs of his regeneration he had the "general approbation of good ministers and other Christians" whom he found among those other seekers attending the good sermons to be found in his neighborhood.[30] The archtype Puritan (like Winthrop), though on a personal quest for his salvation, was not a rugged individualist. The Puritan historian, Marshall Knappen, has properly observed that English Christians, like "Christian" in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, may have made individual pilgrimages, but they went their separate ways sustained by prolonged conversations with fellow seekers. "Divers times" observed Samuel Ward (James I's chaplain) "my mind hath vearly heavenly been exercised in considering, both by med [itation] ... and confer [ence] , of gods godnes in cheering our hartes with the bottomless and unexpressabl treasur of his word, and feling of his favour, and injoying of benef [its] , that he will condescend to such as we are." The high churchman Ward was no different than Richard Rogers, for both relied upon fellowship "as a means of spiritual growth, and were far from being ... lonely souls."[31] They found the sort of assurance which Richard Baxter discovered in communicating his fears to others, and by comforting those who, like himself, wrestled with their salvation.[32]

It was only natural that earnest Christians seek the comfort of others. Indeed, it was generally recognized in English and European protestantism that "assurance" had its social dimension and that the cure of souls depended in part upon the effective support of the congregation.[33] During the decade that the separatist Robert Brown organized a covenanted congregation outside of the English church, Richard Rogers was meeting privately with members of his parish to enhance their faith mutually:

> The next day we mett publicquely ... and after mett privately that company which came by course that day. We conferred, after the matters of judgment and knowledge ended, of such thinges as concerned our edifieinge, and most of us went hom to a neighbours house where I urged them to see the necessitie of this covenaunt makeing, which I lately entred into, they consentinge that they had especiall cause to complaine that thei had much decayed in fervent and earnest desire of pleasinge god.

Concerning the effects of the meeting, we have the testimony of the minister himself: the meeting "caried me on with cheerfulnes, so as I saw it kept me on in my way, and I well felt mine hart to be comforted by it.[34] Nicholas Ferrar, a churchman and friend of the poet George Herbert, organized a religious fellowship among his parishioners and friends that gathered for vigils, meditations and psalm singing.[35] John Eliot had a similar acquaintance with a fellowship of spiritual athletes. "I have known before I came to N [ew] E [ngland] " he observed "a company of Christians who held frequent communion together, used the censure of admonition, yea and of excommunication, with much presence of Christ, only they had not officers, nor the sacraments." If we are to believe Eliot, the group was a fellowship dedicated to self-improvement which comes of "admonition" or the criticism of one's spiritual estate by members of the group. Yet, at the same time, the fellowship was auxiliary to English parish worship and dedicated, in its way, to an improvement of the particular parish of which it was a part. Many years after he migrated to New England, Eliot still believed that a concentrated emphasis upon fellowship in the English church was the best way of reforming and purifying English parishes. He cited Thomas Goodwin and Philip Nye, two more members of the brotherhood, who "have put a pr(eti)ous Epistle before Mr. Hooker's worke touching conversion, where they shew how a common p(ro)fession accepted for Christianity will soone cause conversion, that necessary saving work."[36]

Some of the preachers would carry the fellowship one step further giving substance to mutual obligations intended to promote edification by creating formal covenants meant to further bind the fellowship. Cotton, for example, formed a covenanted group within his parish in 1615. He did not approach the covenant as the separatist might but in the spirit of covenant-making mentioned by Richard Rogers; he regarded the covenant not as "the essential form of a Church ... [but] rather a solemn vow to bind the members of the Church together in nearer fellowship with God and one another." A church he believed, was a "flock of saints" who indulged in mutual edification "in communicating spiritual gifts" to one another. Here was an incipient congregationalism which capitalized upon what might be called the social sources of assurance. Many of the preachers saw a natural equation between faith and fellowship. Cotton, for example, numbered among his acquaintances other clergymen who, with "all the professors amongst the people [in the parish] have entered into such a Covenant to yield professed subjection to the Gospel of Christ, so far as they conceive Christ requireth of them in their places in these times."[37]

John Davenport, like his old Boston friend, saw in the equation between faith and fellowship similar implications for his parish. In taking leave of his St. Stephen's flock in London (ca. 1630) Davenport wrote a detailed treatise meant for the edification of those he was compelled to leave. Quite naturally he placed a primary emphasis upon the need for each church member to seek after his own salvation. In addressing themselves to a reformation of their parish, Davenport was suggesting the church members should think of their parish in terms complimentary to their faith. The church, properly considered, was a fellowship "called by God" whose members joined "together in a holy covenant and communion to set out, the prayses of God." In Davenport's mind "covenant and communion" were synonymous. Indifferent to formal covenants he was concerned with the essence of the covenant, the communal bonds which united a parish "most sweetly and strongly together." Davenport's incipient congregationalism consisted in this: the covenanted or communal relationship was seen as a web of obligations recognized by those in a church; it was a state of mind with a highly conscious sense of religious community which "makes love worke, to looke to the good and to be carefull to prevent the hurt of the whole body" and to "watch over others and to reprove, exhort, comfort, quicken them [church members]."[38]

Cotton and Davenport were among the most articulate exponents of this new regenerative device. While the Boston vicar was typical of many churchmen (conformist and nonconformist) in creating a fellowship of believers in 1615, he, like Davenport, soon found a most ingenious rationale for the relationship between faith, fellowship and covenants in the works of William Ames.[39] Ames, like the other preachers, reflected a zeal for faith-oriented parishes and for that all-important equation between faith and fellowship, and it was in his Medulla Theologia, (published in 1623) that he addressed himself in a systematic way to the question of faith and its relationship to the church. Though Ames was an important spokesman for English Independents, it is quite proper to see him as a spokesman, in a more general way, for those preachers whose half-formed ideals and vague aspirations were making them reformers who would purify the English church by improving its corporate faith. While some preachers like Cotton and Davenport would eventually develop a Congregational polity upon the foundations of Ames, they, like Cotton's colleague Simeon Ash who eventually turned Presbyterian after Cotton had migrated to New England, found much to ponder in Ames' work which was relevant to English parish life in the 1620's.

Ames' systematic theology was meant to explore the nature of faith and the ramifications which such a faith had for Christian institutions. For Ames, faith was seen in its broadest possible extent as a style of life lived within "A Covenant of life, salvation and Grace." He postulated that God had entered into a covenanted relationship or "firme Promise" with those men who were predestined to salvation. In exchange for his being called to election, the sinner was expected to respond with an act of faith "whereby he that is called doth now wholly leane upon Christ as his savior." United by faith with Christ in the covenant of Grace, the elected reprobate received a "Communion of the blessing ... that whereby the faithfull are made partakers of all those things they have need of, to live well, and blessedly with God."[40] Ames' development of the "covenant of Grace" was his particular contribution to the theology of "assurance." He was well aware of the psychological temper of English Christendom, observing that "The Assurance of our calling and election is a thing greatly to be desired."[41] Assurance in Amesian parlance was that "firme Promise" or covenant of Grace, a binding covenant with God which gave concrete expression to the man-God relationship precisely because the English mind was prone to think in covenanted terms.[42]

The most provocative feature of Ames' theology was the equation which he made between faith and fellowship. As Ames put it, "Christ gave himself that the church might be pure that he might have it to himself glorious, that is, a Church not having spot, wrinkle or any such thing, but that it might be holy and unblameable: whence, Election, Redemption, Vocation, Justification, Adoption, Sanctification, Glorification doe in their propriety belong to the same subject, that is, to the same singular men, which make the church." While many English and continental theologians in the Reformed tradition assumed that a true church was composed of the elect, Ames pushed this idea one step further, insisting that demonstrable election, evidenced by the faith of the elect, was the essential feature which marks a congregation of believers as a true church. Since true faith in the individual is the criterion of a true church, the church can only be the effect of faith and not its cause. Speaking of the true church Ames insisted that "it is not firstly actually a Church, and afterward made partaker of Union and Communion with Christ; but because it is united to Christ, therefore it is the Church of Christ."[43]

As a systematic exegesis, Ames' Medulla was meant to redirect Protestant thought towards a piestic interpretation of the church. Whether or not he intended creating an empirical definition of a visible church was to be a point of contention among his disciples for some would seek to create visible churches modeled upon the true church, that is a church of the visibly elect. Some of his disciples would not follow Ames and embark upon a course of Independency. Yet, others would find in the works of the theologian eventual justification for independent congregations of the faithful. For Ames, Independency was almost inevitable. The reality of Christianity for him was Christian faith and the worship of Christians. Preoccupied with faith, the theologian placed an overwhelming emphasis upon what he called "particular churches."

A particular church or congregation was a fellowship of the faithful "joyned together by a speciall bond among themselves... this bond is a covenant, either express or implicit, whereby believers doe particularly bind themselves, to performe all those duties, both toward God and one toward another which pertaine to the respect and edification of the Church..." Ames was a Christian moralist who believed in man as a moral being, a being which could recognize obligations to God and his fellow Christians. He celebrated individual responsibility and believed that men could worship God and create religious institutions through voluntary association and by collective activity. He also believed that since a particular church was an institution of the faithful, the members should have the right to censure themselves. Thus, he saw organized religion and ecclesiastical governments in terms of the voluntary fellowship, though he would be the first to admit that a congregation was not an isolated fellowship but one of many particular churches which were the visible parts of a catholic church. With his faith in fellowship and voluntary association, Ames believed that churches would combine themselves for mutual help and guidance. "Particular Churches", Ames insisted, "as their Communion doth require, the light of nature and equity of rules and examples of scripture doe teach, may and oftentimes also ought to enter into a mutuall confederacy and fellowship among themselves in Classes and Synods, that they may use their common consent and mutuall helpe as much as fitly may be, in those things especially which are of greater moment; but that combination doth neither constitute a new forme of a Church, neither ought it to take away or diminish any way, that liberty and power which Christ hath left to his Churches."[44]

Like so many other preachers, Ames no doubt reflected the opinions of Thomas Cartwright and those like his (Ames') master, William Perkins, who joined with Cartwright in the abortive Classis Movement. Reform for the older generation had been in terms of an Elizabethan Presbyterianism while reform for many of the younger ministers was in terms of voluntary association in the parish and among the ministers. Perhaps Ames spoke so forcefully for his generation because his work could be viewed as a synthesis of Perkins and Cartwright, a combination of a practical theology and a program for the reformation of English parishes yet upon a voluntary basis rather than in the discredited terms of the older generation.

There was, in addition, a second important influence upon Ames, for the Medulla was first published thirteen years after Ames fled the kingdom for the less hostile Reformed churches in the Dutch Netherlands.[45] Here he eventually became associated with the English Classis of nonconforming ministers formed by the Scottish Presbyterian, John Forbes, to create a measure of order and uniformity among the numerous English congregations which had been organized in the Dutch Netherlands during the first three decades of the seventeenth century. In time, the Classis would include John Davenport, Thomas Hooker and Hugh Peter all of whom found the Netherlands more congenial to their growing nonconformity to the English church.[46]

Though established by the provisions of a Dutch charter to impose respectability and an orthodox doctrine upon the English congregations, the English Classis developed a reputation for deviating from standard Reformed practices. While James I, to his dismay, believed the group to be "entirely Presbyterian" in its fidelity to a Reformed rubric, the Dutch authorities as well as the ministers in the Dutch Reformed Classis considered the ministers to be Brownists, Jacobites and schismatics who refused to exercise a thorough discipline over their churches.[47] Davenport, for one, was working towards a definition of the church which would not permit him to baptize children of parents who could not demonstrate some prior commitment to a professed faith in Christ. Such rigidity seemed to the Reformed ministers like an excessive nonconformity and willful schism.[48] Hugh Peter indicated the direction of his thought when, in preparation for Ames' assumption of co-pastoral duties in Peter's Rotterdam church in 1633, he reorganized the church and excluded those old members who would not own the covenant which he introduced. Peter took an important step towards a more formal congregationalism by making a regenerative device into an instrument of organization as well, an act which made him appear to be a Brownist in Dutch eyes. No doubt he hoped to improve the quality of fellowship in the congregations, for the covenant was a practical document designed to help the church members "studie unitie and brotherly love." It was hoped that the growth of Christian knowledge could be fostered in conference, prayer and meditation. Scripture was to be the ultimate authority in all controversies, while the covenant further insisted that the members were "to submit to brotherly admonition and Censure without envie or anger" and "to be thoroughly reconciled one to another even in Judgement before wee begin this work."[49]

Peter was given considerable leeway in reorganizing his church though he may well have been encouraged by some other ministers in the classis. While the classis members were present at the Rotterdam reorganization, the ministers took a laissez faire attitude in keeping with a nonconformist and Amesian point of view, insisting that the authority of classes and synods was "only a power of Counsailing and Advising."[50] Whether or not the English classis enjoyed the authority of the Dutch counterpart, it was sufficiently effective as the agent and abettor of innovation to anger an English king and the Dutch Estates General. If James opposed the introduction of a Reformed service into churches which should have honored the English rubric, the Dutch authorities opposed what they considered to be the separatist tendencies which were encouraged by ministers who shunned coercive authority and sanctioned convenanted congregations.

Such innovations marked the English Classis for certain dissolution by the authorities. Searching for a place to practice what was soon to be forbidden, some of the ministers turned towards New England then being peopled by friends and colleagues known for their nonconformity. Hooker took passage for Massachusetts Bay in 1633. Peters followed in 1635 while Davenport, returning to the England of Laud and Charles I in 1636, left for New England in the following year.[51] Death prevented Ames and possibly John Forbes from joining in the spiritual colonization of New England. Their places were taken up by a variety of English ministers fleeing the thorough program of Archbishop Laud which was intended to destroy all low-church, nonconformist and Reformed influence in an English church which the archbishop intended to make more sacramental in nature. Hooker was joined in passage by Cotton and Samuel Stone after Cotton, fleeing Laud's agents, was turned aside to New England by Hooker's pessimistic view of things in the Netherlands. Holland's loss was New England's gain, however. The arrival of Hooker and Cotton was duly noted by an enthusiastic Governor Winthrop who observed that "our estate heere both Politick and Eccl [es] ia [stica] ll ... although we cannot professe a perfection in either (which is not to be looked for in this worlde) yet it is such as the Lord's holy and wise servants ... doe approve of, and accordingly doe joyne with us in the same Course: I meane especially those 2 rever [en] d and faithful min iste rs Mr. Cotton and Mr. Hooker."[52]

It was no doubt Hooker and Cotton who began the practice of fortnightly meetings instituted by the ministers shortly after the arrival of the two luminaries. From the beginning, however, Roger Williams and Samuel Skelton of Salem boycotted the ministerial meetings, fearing that they "might grow in time to a presbytery or superintendency to the prejudice of the churches liberties."[53] Without the two separatists, the group (including those clergymen who settled in the colony during the next three years) was moderate in its nonconformist outlook. Their recent experiences in England made them hostile to episcopal authority and the English rubric. As ministers who reveled in a thundering sermon, they left an English church no longer ruled by Archbishop Abbot, a Calvinist who had encouraged sermonizing, preachers, and even unordained lecturers. Almost to a man, the ministers were preachers and many, like Hooker, Cotton, John Phillips and Peter Bulkley (Concord, 1635) had outstanding reputations as sermonizers who could work up parishioners to the all important experience of conversion. Many could trace their pedigree in the brotherhood to influential nonconformists like Ward, the Rogers' family, Sibbes, Hildersham, Dod, Ball and Preston. Time would demonstrate that most of the ministers embodied that configuration of ideals peculiar to the brotherhood which came to a focus upon experienced faith and a commitment to reformation by faith and purified institutions. The exact nature of that purification was a moot question. In their various commitments the gathered clergy embraced a range of views from a strict congregationalism to outright Presbyterianism. Phillips fell into the former category, John Warham and John Maverick of Dorchester, like Thomas Parker and James Noyes of Newbury, were inclined towards a presbyterian administration of their congregations. Parker was the son of Robert Parker, an early spokesman for Independency who became an apostate, turning Presbyterian after he fled England for the Netherlands.[54] A few had read deeply in Ames, Baynes, Parker, Bradshaw and Cartwright -- these were to become the Bay controversialists, the leaders in debate who were most sure of their academic prowess. John Wilson of Boston was an earnest pastor and disciplinarian, a student of Baynes and a friend of Ames. Richard Mather (who settled a Dorchester congregation in late 1635) was particularly studious of English reform literature; Hooker, Cotton and Peter (who replaced Williams at Salem in 1635) were diligent students of English Puritanism and drew a good part of their sustenance from the works of Ames.

A significant number of these controversialists were also bound to one another by personal ties and had participated in ministerial associations. Thomas Shepard, who fits into all three categories, decided to migrate to New England "when Mr. Hooker and Mr. Cotton were gone, and I saw the hearts of most of the godly set and bent that way."[55] Collectively these ministers constituted an important core group in the ministerial community -- Hooker, Cotton, Shepard, Eliot and Weld (Hooker's old Chelmsford associates now serving Roxbury), Bulkley, Wilson, Davenport (for a short time and, thereafter, intermittently) and Mather. Here was an inner community of the articulate, prize students at Cambridge, parish preachers with a reputation for sermonizing and dialectics. From this group would arise the influential proposition, forcefully put, which would tend to standardize opinion; and here would appear those all-important differences of opinion, put forth by various ministers with equal vigor, which would create controversy in the colony.

The gathering of the Bay clergy in 1633 represented one more ministerial association of neighboring ministers. There was one important difference, however. The Bay churches were not nearly so homogenous as the English parishes had been, nor were they so docile in submitting to either external influence or the authority of their own ministers. Any future definition of the New England Way would be profoundly influenced by the individual congregations, for the establishment of religion in New England was the work not only of the ministers but of articulate laymen who were dedicated to their own views of a purified church. If the ministers thought of themselves as a ministerial fellowship or association organized to promote Christian unity, the churches would have to think of themselves as a community of churches dedicated to a single form of church discipline and espousing one point of view before a viable New England Way could emerge. It was the pursuit of a common identity and a common discipline which was to occupy the ministers, magistrates and churches in the colony's formative years.

II

Transition:
A "Modell of Church and Civill Power,"
1630--1635

Between 1629 and 1635 a dozen congregations were settled in Massachusetts Bay. Properly speaking, they constituted no systematic form of polity or discipline. Each congregation was organized upon principles evolved by its members, prinicples which were sometimes inimical to those found in other congregations. Yet the churches had in common a nonconformist identity, and during these formative years they came to look upon themselves as a community of churches. This transition was made possible because the churches developed instruments intended to create a consociation of congregations. Of these instruments, the ministerial association was to be a primary means of consociation and the ministers the chief advocates of unity and cohesion among the congregations. The clergy's immediate concern was the separatism of Salem and its minister, Roger Williams. In response to a separatist challenge which threatened the future of consociation, the ministers drew up a "Modell of Church and Civill Power" to provide guidelines for the organization of congregations and to define the relationship between the congregation and external authority. Important both for what was included and what went undefined, the "Modell" was the first example of a collective ministerial mind undergoing a transition and of a theoretical church polity in the process of development.

Because opinions and practices were in a state of flux during these formative years, due consideration should be given to differences of opinion among ministers and congregations; at the same time it is most certainly important to emphasize those common beliefs and procedures from which a viable church discipline was derived. For the contemporary observer church discipline was developmental, "raise [d] up," Governor Winthrop observed, "by practice and custom."[1] That is to say, a variety of opinions were translated into procedures and developed over a period of time before they became the customary way of doing things. Only with time could appropriate procedures be established and codified. In the interim, differences of opinion would carry an undue amount of weight as the congregations adjusted to one another and came to emphasize their common ideals. Thus, tensions created by competing points of view were as important an influence upon an initial definition of church polity as were those areas of agreement which lent specific content to a long term definition of the New England Way. Church discipline and its supporting ideology were not imported as a piece of whole cloth, but built up out of the separate experiences in each congregation and codified as the group of churches came to act in concert.

Especially influential in this process because of its separatist tendencies was the Salem congregation organized by a covenant in 1629 under the direction of its ministers, Francis Higginson and Samuel Skelton, and the colony's chief magistrate of the moment (before Winthrop arrived), John Endecott. Endecott was an acquaintance of Hugh Peter and had invited Peter to join in the colonization of Salem. It may have been this association which helped form Endecott's view of church discipline, though it is to be doubted that Peter's opinions completely prepared Endecott for the type of church government subsequently established at Salem. While a preacher and an early disciple of Ames, Peter was without experience in the matter of church organization by convenant during his association with Endecott. He was to serve for three years at Rotterdam before he finally recovenanted that church in 1633, a full four years after the formation of the Salem church.[2] Endecott had a mind of his own and discovered during a visit in 1629 with Plymouth's deacon Samuel Fuller, that Plymouth's separatism was "(as far as I can yet gather) no other than is warranted by the evidence of truth, and the same which I have professed and maintained, ever since the Lord in mercy revealed himself unto me..."[3] Endecott need not have been a separatist to appreciate the Plymouth form of church discipline, but his appreciation did no doubt reinforce the opinions of Skelton, a studied separatist. In 1630 John Cotton believed his Lincolnshire colleague had become intoxicated with Plymouth's separatism, though he later was forced to conclude that "Mr. Skelton ... was studious of that way, before he left Holland in Lincolnshire."[4] For the moment, Higginson exerted a moderating influence on his co-pastor. A nonconformist sufficiently versed in the ways of Arthur Hildersham to have the latter's approbation before he was selected as a minister for the infant Salem colony, Higginson may well have used covenants and vows in England for it was he who determined the content of Salem's first covenant. Thus it was by a covenant that the Salem congregation was organized and its members bound "to walke together in all his [God's] waies, according as he is pleased to reveale himself unto us."[5]

Whether or not the church was consciously organized as a separatist church, the Salem congregation was a covenanted congregation like that to be found at Plymouth. To the separatist, the visible church was properly organized only when it was covenanted. Henry Jacob, for example, argued that a visible church had to be established "By a free mutuall consent of Believers joyning and covenanting to live as Members of a holy Society togeather in all religious and vertuous duties."[6] In some things Higginson's "principles were a little discrepant from theirs at Plymouth." But both Higginson and Skelton recognized that a covenanted church had a right to call its own ministers. While insisting that they were initially called by God to be ministers, both ministers also admitted that the church had a right to call them before they could serve as its ministers. With his death in 1630, Higginson's moderate and restraining hand was no longer felt and Skelton subsequently "did not in some things not only imitate and equal, but strongly endeavour to go beyond that pattern of separation set up before them at Plymouth."[7] This stringent separatism was openly expressed in 1630 when Skelton refused to baptize the child of William Coddington or to serve communion to other members of the Winthrop fleet when they approached the Salem church after their arrival.[8] Whereas the members of the fleet assumed that their status as English parish members in good standing made them eligible for the sacraments, Skelton stood by his separatist convictions, insisting that only those within the church covenant could receive the ordinances of the church.

In seeking communion with the Salem church, Winthrop and his friends reflected the views of those moderate nonconforming ministers who had counseled the colonists before they left England. Coddington was a member of Cotton's Boston parish and quite probably had been a part of Cotton's covenanted inner circle. Thomas Dudley and John Winthrop were both acquaintances of Cotton, the minister chosen to deliver the farewell sermon to the departing Winthrop fleet. The governor, meanwhile, had been in correspondence with William Ames, had invited Ames to accompany the fleet to America as a minister and was therefore no doubt susceptible to the views expressed by that divine.[9]

Cotton's understanding of covenants was markedly different from that of Skelton. Informed by his friends of Skelton's uncharitable act Cotton wrote a stinging rebuke, hoping to change his erstwhile colleague's opinions. Explicit covenants, Cotton insisted, were vows intended to create a binding fellowship and not the "essential cause" of the church. The colonists of the fleet had been right in asking to receive the ordinances, for a man's faith makes him a member of the catholic church and thus he is eligible to receive the ordinances in any church.[10] Cotton, like Ames, believed in particular, reformed churches, but he also insisted that they were parts of a larger, catholic or universal church.[11]

Here then, were the primary differences between a separatist view of a congregation of believers and the more moderate, non-separating type of incipient congregationalism expressed by a variety of English ministers. The strength of the fellowship was more important than the formalities of the covenant, while the fellowships were seen as existing within a larger structure, namely the catholic church. Such was Cotton's view of things in the early thirties. It reflected his position as a parish priest who thought of his parish as a particular, reformed church existing as one visible part of the English communion. Fellow associates holding precisely the same view would be scandalized a few years after Cotton migrated to New England, accusing him of deviating from the moderate, reforming course they steered between the extremes of separatism and the popish vestiges to be found among adherents of anglo-Catholicism.[12] They would accuse Cotton of abandoning a view of the church which permitted nonconformist ministers to improve their particular churches by preaching and instituting a simplified service while still looking at the parish as part of a larger whole. Baptism and the Lord's Supper could be received by a parish member in any other parish, they insisted, while the minister's call made him a minister to believers in each and every parish. "The communion of Saints" insisted William Rathband and Simeon Ash "whether visible or invisible is the effect and property of the Church Catholike.... and if particular Churches have communion together it must of necessity be, that they bee parts and members of the whole body which is one."[13] These words could as well have been those of Cotton in 1630, for they expressed his attitude towards the English church until some time after he had migrated to New England.

If, by seeking communion with the Salem congregation, Winthrop and his friends carried out the logic of this position, the organized Boston congregation further reflected the moderate and nonseparating attitude of its founders. After consultation between the would-be members of the Boston church and the Salem and Plymouth congregations, the church was organized by a covenant similar to that used at Salem and which bound its members "to walk in all our wayes according to the Rule of the Gospell ... and in mutuall love, and respect each to other."[14] The decision to use a covenant need not have been a reflection of Ames' and Cotton's influence, though the document was most certainly applied in the spirit of the two divines. Indeed, that decision may never have been publicly rationalized for the tradition of covenants, vows and fellowship were a natural part of life in the English church. At the same time, covenants or contracts were an everyday part of establishing voluntary societies and business organizations. They were assumed in a variety of relationships, and many Englishmen believed that contracts were the essence of the political obligation to be found in government.[15] No doubt the Boston covenant by which the church was organized reflected a mingling of several views of the covenant, and while drawing its strength from formal contractual relationships the church fellowship was understood in terms of that voluntaryism and Christian moralism which was at the heart of Ames' doctrine.

An account of the organizational proceedings strongly suggests that the Boston covenant was meant to strengthen a congregational fellowship, a particular church or society, rather than to establish a separate congregation which derived its rights and authority from a covenant. Thus, the Boston congregation was thought of as a "society" of believers organized among settlers "known each to other." Making known their desire to enjoy the benefits of the ordinances, they entered "into covenant with the Lord to walk in his ways." The process of organization proceeded slowly for the colonists wished to avoid any rash acts. Officers were not immediately elected, nor was the church opened to everyone, for the original members would not admit "any other into their society than a few, to wit, such as are well known unto them, promising after to receive in such, by confession, as shall appear to be fitly qualified for that estate."[16] In excluding others from the ordinances, it does not appear that the church members derived their sense of exclusivity from the covenant, though they did make it abundantly clear that the scandalous and the ignorant would not be admitted to fellowship with earnest Christians. To that extent they would purify their church, for they were unfamiliar with the beliefs of a majority of the settlers and found it easier to proceed by degrees in establishing a fellowship which gained cohesion because of the mutual trust and knowledge of its members. Nor did the minister chosen to serve the church see separatist connotations in a call from a covenanted group. When John Wilson accepted his call, he protested that it was "only a sign of election and confirmation, not of any intent that [he] ... should renounce his ministry he received in England."[17] In a number of important ways then, two churches organized by covenants and "electing" their ministers had an essentially different outlook toward covenanted church communities. While Salem tended towards a separatist purity, the early Boston church functioned very much in the manner of an English parish and had a tendency toward "one church, one community."[18]

The Watertown and Dorchester churches were each distinctly the creatures of their members. The Dorchester church was an uncovenanted group of persons organized in England under the watchful eye of the Presbyterian, John White. Reflecting a moderate and presbyterian view of an open or mixed church, John Warham, Dorchester's minister, found himself disagreeing with Plymouth's deacon Fuller because Warham believed that "the visible church may consist of a mixed people, godly and openly ungodly."[19] The Watertown congregation, on the other hand, was considerably closer in organization to what became normative practice in the colony's churches. Richard Brown, the ruling elder, had been a member of Henry Jacob's covenanted London church. George Phillips, meanwhile, was a preacher who enjoyed a reputation from the very beginning as one well versed in matters of church discipline. He, too, placed considerably more weight upon the legal implications of the covenant than did, for example, John Wilson, for Phillips insisted before deacon Fuller that if his church "will have him stand minister, by that calling which he received from the prelates in England, he will leave them."[20]

Neither the early ministers nor their flocks identified themselves as emerging from any particular point of view. These were the formative years, William Hubbard observed, years in which the ministers "walked something in an untrodden path." Therefore, "it is less to be wondered at, if they went but in and out, in some things complying too much, in some things, not sufficiently attending to the order of the gospel as themselves thought they understood afterwards." When Hooker and Cotton arrived in 1633, they "found severall Churches gathered, and standing in the same Order" at Charlestown, Dorchester, Boston, Salem, Watertown and Roxbury. Cotton doubted though, that the churches had any clear idea of their precise origins "for I beleeve most of them know not what it was, if any at all."[21]

Here was a de facto congregationalism, a collection of churches organized in terms of the interests and ideals to be found in each group. In a nonconformist's vein the ideals of the church members overlapped to a certain degree, yet each church maintained a fairly unique point of view. The churches were Calvinist or Reformed in outlook, thought of a minister primarily as a preacher and teacher, and inclined to stylize church officers and discipline in terms consistent with the early, apostolic church as described in scripture. Yet Salem was separatist in outlook and would continue to grow in its separatism under the ministry of Williams until checked by the other churches and the government. Boston was moderate and community oriented. It would be influenced by the ministry of John Cotton after 1633 who, when seeking membership for himself in the church upon his arrival, stated his profession of faith in terms meant to indicate that he was shedding or at least modifying some of his former opinions. Thus he insisted that he did not have the right to baptize his child born at sea because there was no established congregation on board ship and "a minister hath no power to give the seals but in his own congregation."[22] Dorchester, meanwhile, like the Newbury congregation soon to be formed by Parker and Noyes, was Presbyterian in outlook and in its openness towards the community.

If there was no common identity beyond a Reformed outlook at first, the churches did share a nonconformist bond. As English protestants at odds with the paraphernalia of the English church service and dedicated to the search for a purified faith, many church members and ministers saw themselves as a unique people. Cotton and Hooker, for example, in writing to friends in England, spoke of themselves as persecuted Christians who had left the kingdom to "enjoy the liberty, not of some ordinances of God, but of all, and all in purity."[23] John Endecott demonstrated the nonconformist bond at work in New England when he wrote to Plymouth's governor Bradford in 1629: "It is a thing not usual, that servants to one master and of the same household should be strangers; I assure you I desire it not, nay to speak more plainly, I cannot be so to you: God's people are marked with one and the same mark, and sealed with one and the same seal, and have for the main one and the same heart, guided by one and the same spirit of truth; and where this is, there can be no discord, nay, here must needs be sweet harmony."[24]

In assessing this seventeenth century mentality to be found among English Christians in New England, it is important to realize that a congruency of opinion among Christians was considered as much a sign of truth at work as the application of truths in the churches derived by formal proofs and beholden to this or that point of view. The greatest reality for magistrate and minister was not a theoretical model but a viable Christian institution consonant with holy writ, an institution which demonstrated an essential feature of a Christian church -- unity. This is not to say that divisions and dissension never prevailed when New Englanders addressed themselves to questions of polity and theology. But in their disputes they were often motivated, ironic though it may seem, by their common quest for unity. William Bradford, for example, observed that there had been no prior agreement concerning church procedures among the members of the various congregations, yet "they did, as if they had agreed, by the same spirit of truth and unity, set up, by the help of Christ, the same model of churches ... and if they of Plymouth have helped any of the first comers in their theory, by hearing and discerning their practices, therein the Scripture is fulfilled that the kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven which a woman took."[25]

Accepting the existence of this peculiar mentality, it is possible to see a "leaven" of sorts at work among English protestants who believed they were fulfilling prophecy in promoting unity as the agents of a divine power. There was a compelling force to be found in scriptural injunctions by students of the Bible who believed in this leaven. Thus, the example of Christian enclaves scattered across the face of the Roman Empire and the unifying effect upon those enclaves of the apostolic ministry provided scriptural examples of a decentralized polity with which the Bay churches could identify. With time, Biblical models helped mold institutions while scriptural examples were treated as divine law. In retrospect, this relationship between the Bay congregations and the apostolic churches seemed self-evident to the church member, though it is to be doubted that the first colonists made so facile a deduction.

Yet significant features of scriptural models were exploited from the beginning. The early churches were cited, in another context, by the leaders of the Winthrop fleet whose Humble Request compared the church to be established in New England to the "Church of Phillipi" which was founded by a colony sent out from Rome.[26] For colonists familiar with the Pauline epistles another feature of the apostolic church was to be of incalcuable use to them -- the extended right hand of fellowship. As used in the apostolic church, the right hand was extended as a sign of the fellowship and unity seen to exist between Christian congregations with differing mores and composed of that polyglot citizenry which was to be found in the Roman Empire. Thus, when Paul, Barnabas and Titus visited the Jerusalem church, they were initially rejected as uncircumcised Jews, but "James, Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me [Paul, and] they gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship."[27]

As used among New Englanders, the extended right hand had much the same effect. While still in England, Cotton had instructed those members of his Boston parish in the Winthrop fleet "to take advice of them at Plymouth and ... do nothing to offend them." Though Cotton admonished Skelton for his separatism, he prefaced his remarks with an acknowledgment that he (Cotton) held Plymouth residents (who supposedly influenced Skelton) in the highest esteem "as godly and loving Christians." Cotton also chided Skelton for his lack of Christian charity when Skelton, in refusing communion and baptism to members of the Winthrop fleet, also refused to extend "the right hand of fellowship to us" in the English church.[28] Whether deacon Fuller did in fact persuade the Salemites to embrace a separatist polity, the deacon's visit was significant for an entirely different reason. By making a hazardous trip from Plymouth to Salem in 1629 and by repeating this act in 1630 with the organization of the Boston church, Fuller was able to alleviate much mutual hostility between the leaders of the Bay colony and New Plymouth. Thus, the Plymouth congregation through its emissary Fuller extended the "right hand of fellowship" to the newly formed Salem congregation in 1629 while, in the following year, leaders in the Boston church conferred with

Plymouth men about church government, indicating that "they would do nothing without our advice, I mean those members of our [the Plymouth] church, ther known unto them ... requiring our voices as their own, when it was concluded, that the Lord was to be sought in righteousness."[29]

The right hand of fellowship was formally extended when ministers and churches gathered for an ordination. After Cotton was chosen pastor of the Boston church, neighboring ministers extended "the right hand of fellowship" and repeated the act on the following day when Hooker and Stone were ordained in the Newtown (Cambridge) congregation.[30] Such intercongregational meetings provided the opportunity for a comparison of ideas, an exchange of opinions or a discussion of mutual problems. Distance frequently meant that the elders of one congregation (for so they were being called in imitation of the Reformed discipline) must communicate their problems to the elders of another church, such as when the Boston church wrote "to the elders and brethren of the churches of Plymouth" requesting advice on "whether one person might be a civil magistrate and a ruling elder at the same time?"[31] When opportunity permitted, churches also enjoyed exchanging delegations. Pastor Wilson and Governor Winthrop journeyed to Plymouth where they partook of the Lords Supper and contributed their opinions during a prophesying in which Roger Williams (then ministering at Plymouth) propounded a question while pastor Ralph Leveritch, Wilson and Winthrop gave their thoughts on the subject.[32]

Interchurch communion or consociation proved a useful means of settling disputed matters in a divided congregation. The Boston and

Watertown congregations met intermittently during 1631 and 1632 to settle a variety of matters involving opinions on the nature of a "true church" and admission procedures. This exchange was especially important for a precedent was created during the proceedings. When the disputes had gone unsettled even after a letter was sent by the magistrates questioning the qualifications of Watertown's ruling elder, Winthrop, deputy governor Thomas Dudley and Increase Nowell, the Boston ruling elder, appeared before the Watertown church to offer its members a choice in the manner of settling the dispute. The three Boston church members could be received, Winthrop informed the Watertown congregation, "1. As the magistrates (their assistance being desired). 2. As members of a neighboring congregation. 3. Upon the answer to which was received of our letter, which did no way satisfy us." George Phillips, whom Hubbard believed was "at first [the minister in the colony] most acquainted with the way of church discipline" chose the second course, a very significant choice which meant that consociation rather than magisterial authority was to be the optimum method of solving problems in a distracted congregation henceforth.[33]

While Phillips may have lifted his reply to Winthrop from Ames, interchurch visits, like larger and more public meetings of churches which were then taking place, were developing out of the immediate needs of the congregations. The large public gatherings bore a striking resemblance to the public prophesyings to be found in the English church. One of the more familiar sights along the spiderweb of roads connecting Boston and the adjacent communities was pastor Wilson in the van of a crowd of ministers, magistrates and churchmembers traveling to one or another of the nearby meeting houses to hear a public lecture. These social occasions were turned to a profitable use. Public discussion among the ministers and laymen was undertaken after the lecture and by such means interchurch communion helped standardize doctrine as ministers and their churchmembers tried to square their own views with those preached down the road. No doubt differences of opinion aired at these prophesyings permitted a good deal of individual expression and perhaps even the public expression of heterodox views. In the balance, however, the public gatherings were found beneficial and consequently ratified in the 1641 Body of Liberties because, so that document suggested, they prevented and removed "errour and offence that may grow and spread in any of the Churches in this jurisdiction."[34] The public assembly on the Thursday of Cotton's weekly lecture in Boston was of special importance. The ministers met privately at pastor Wilson's house afterwards, providing an opportunity for magistrates, churches and individuals to appear before the group for advice and consultation. In 1635, for example, a badly divided Saugus church appealed by letter for help, asking advice of the elders in a dispute over the congregation's status as a true church.[35]

In their own meetings, the clergy functioned as a primary means of consociation. Collectively they constituted the most articulate and highly educated group in the colony. It was only natural, therefore, that they should debate religious matters among themselves and serve as a council for religious matters when summoned by the magistracy. Thus, when differences between Salem and the colony demanded a definition of authority which could be applied to an obdurate congregation, the ministers turned to "the elders and brethren of every church within this jurisdiction that they will consult and advise one uniform order of discipline in the churches, agreeable to scripture, and then to consider how farr the magistrates are bound to interpose for the preservation of that uniformity and peace of the churches." The churches, as a group, were not equipped to deal with so extensive a deliberative matter. As a result, the task of providing the magistrates with the desired answers was left to the ministerial association and they responded with a "Modell of Church and Civill Power."[36]

To understand the "Modell" is to understand the temper of and the problems among the churches during the transitional years in which the document was composed. The Bay ministers, as the agents of unity, were attempting in their meetings and by various consociational instruments to create a community of churches. For their own part, the ministerial association might be likened to a monastic community whose esprit de corps grew from the constant association among the members for consultation, meditation and prayer. Like the the church fellowships, the ministerial association was an exercise in group edification and mutual admonition. A colleague could expect a mild censure from John Eliot such as "brother learn the meaning of those three little words, bear, forbear, forgive." The clergy was constantly exhorted to keep its sights high and to seal its deliberations with prayer for as Eliot observed, "The Lord Jesus takes much notice of what is done and said among his ministers when they are together."[37]

Williams, in boycotting such meetings, stood outside the ministerial community and thus miscalculated the temper of fraternalism among the churches and within the ministry. Cotton was later to insist that Williams never did "have any intelligence of our affaires" because he was a loner. "He [Williams] had some fellowship with us and might have had more, but that hee suspected all the Status Conventus of the Elders to bee unwarrantable, and such as might in time make way to Presbyteriall government." On that particular occasion when Williams walked out of the ministers' gathering, the ministers had tried to convince him that "no church or person can have power over another church; neither did they in their meetings exercise any such jurisdiction."[38] But Williams was not interested in fellowship. Moreover, his particularist's attitude towards such things went far beyond denying the influence of the clergy when he spurned their company. Whereas the clergy was bent upon reconciliation in the community of churches, Williams was preaching a separatism and propagating a seeker's point of view which was the very antithesis of reconciliation. He began by refusing to serve the Boston fellowship in 1631 during pastor Wilson's absence because the Boston church, true to the nonseparating views of its members, "would not make a public declaration of their repentance for having communion with the churches of England."[39] Next, he insisted that tendering an oath to an unregenerate or worship with one's wife and child were dangerous because a regenerate Christian must not have communion with the unregenerate.[40] Williams was fast approaching that lonely seekerism which was eventually to cause his separation from all of his fellow Christians in his pursuit of purity. Williams' basic drives were mystifying. When Governor Winthrop asked him, for example, from "what spirit, and to what end do you drive?", Williams replied in the purist's rhetoric: "I also seek Jesus who was nailed to the gallows, I ask the way to lost Zion, I witness what I believe I see patiently (the Lord assisting) in sackcloth, I long for the bright appearance of the Lord Jesus to consume the man of sin, I long for the appearance of the Lamb's wife, also New Jerusalem."[41]

In promoting his schismatic views, Williams used the good offices of consociation in an attempt to have the churches censure their deputies for passing a law detrimental to the interests of Salem.[42] In an effort at reconciliation, the ministers met with the Salem pastor on three different occasions, but they finally gave up, insisting that any person who would maintain such vehement opinions tending to schism should be removed by the magistracy.[43] Spurned by his fellow ministers, Williams was banished by the magistrates after a last symbolic act when he disassociated himself from the other churches and his own because his congregation would not separate from those who were "Full of antichristian pollution."[44]

Needless to say, Williams' seekerism ran counter to every tenet of organized religion for which the Bay leadership stood. Williams promoted a particularism which asked earnest Christians to spurn the fellowship of fellow church members and of other congregations because fellowship might taint the purity of the believers. This view was in direct contrast to consociationalism. "The communion of Saints is accounted an Article of [our] ... Creed" Cotton was to suggest sometime later, and the "communion of Churches is but a branch thereof."[45] Understandably, the ministers were anxious to preserve peace within the churches and for that reason sent a copy of their recently composed "Modell" to the Salem congregation. When the church members saw the shape of things to come they abandoned their minister, a fact which so chagrined the Salem preacher that he subsequently included the pernicious document in his Bloudy Tenet of Persecution and referred to the incident "as further confirmation of the bloudy doctrine of Persecution."[46] Though Williams tried to cast the onus for his banishment on Cotton, the Boston pastor replied that the work sent to the Salem church was written by his "Brethren (The Elders of those churches)."[47] It was, then, as the clergy's answer to William's separatism and in an attempt to set down on paper a blueprint for a congregation and a community of churches that the "Modell" should be viewed.

Williams attacked the "Modell" because it favored "a state Church (Whether explicite, as in Old England, or implicite, as in New)."[48] There was a measure of validity in this assertion, for the ministers were interested in emphasizing the unity of the churches to the point of thinking in terms of one colonial "church" as well as in terms of particular churches. Their analysis turned upon the definition of power spheres, the clergy suggesting that a strong church and a strong state had independent sources of authority which should be jointly directed against schism by mutual cooperation of the two powers. Such was the ministers' interpretation of religious liberty that they saw in coordinate spheres of authority a "Christian liberty not freeing us from subjection to Authority, but from inthrallment and bondage unto sinne."[49] Each power was superior in its own sphere with the magistrate exercising a superior "earthly power in the World", and yet subordinate to the Church "ruling and ordering him by Spirituall Ordinances." It followed, for the clergy, that "the delinquencie of either party calleth for the exercise of the power of terrour from the other part." The magistrate, as a "nursing father", together with the churches was to correct a congregation which "offends its neighbours of the commonwealth" while the offending magistrate was to be subject to church censure by his congregation "in a brotherly way."[50]

If the ministers wanted magisterial power available to check a Williams, they did not want the churches under the magistrate's thumb. They only desired the umbrella protection of civil authority so that they might determine and then apply a proper discipline in the churches. They wanted a free hand to develop a Reformed service, and therefore insisted that the magistracy could not impose "Surplices, Crosse, Kneeling at Sacrament, Salt and spittle in baptism."[51] As good nonconformists, the ministers knew what was to be avoided in church services, but in keeping with the differences in their background they were still vague about what they deemed desirable in matters of discipline. For the moment they settled upon a bland Reformed formulation and asked only that the churches establish a pattern consistent with holy writ and elect and ordain only those officers to be found in the apostolic churches -- teachers, pastors, and ruling elders. When listing the qualifications for a properly constituted congregation, the ministers made three stipulations which suggest that they were primarily interested in compatibility and fellowship in and between the churches. The only criterion for membership was that the candidate be "approved" by the congregation. A congregation, meanwhile, could be formed by any group who would "voluntarily joyn themselves in holy Covenant" and be willing to accept "the right hand of fellowship from other neighbor Churches."[52]

The main concern of the document was with power and authority relationships, with bringing the various congregations into a concrete relationship with one another for purposes of unity and discipline. The churches were not considered entirely autonomous but in a definite synodical relationship to each other. The composition of a synod, the clergy suggested, would vary, depending on circumstances. In corrupt times, the magistracy was obliged to call the fittest members from each congregation to gather "in Synods to discuss and declare from the word of God, matters of doctrine and worship in controversy and to helpe forward the reformation of the church of God." Under ordinary circumstances, however, it was enough that the magistrates "give liberty to the Elders of the severall churches assemblying themselves together by their owne mutuall and voluntary agreement at convenient times as the means appointed of God whereby he may mediately reforme matters amisse in churches." Simply put, the ministerial association was to be transformed into a standing "synod assembly." The clergy were to be the reformers and arbiters, the architects of church discipline and theology in the Bay colony. Ideally, such ministerial meetings were to be conducted on a monthly basis "upon the Lecture day of every church where lectures are." In addition, the ministers were to hold a yearly meeting open to the public where questions were to be submitted by the congregations for resolution. If the ministers hoped to invest their association with more formal trappings, they continued to think of their authority as that which they originally exercised in their meetings. Synods, the clergy insisted, should exercise their authority only by way of counsel, leaving each congregation to apply synodical pronouncements insofar as the local officers and congregation believed that the synod's directives agreed "with the word of God."[53]

Apart from this last statement, the "Modell" was a document so general in outlook that it could have been written by a Scottish or English Presbyterian or a Dutch Reformed minister. That is to say, it was the work of English nonconformists, seeking to develop a less coercive form of classical authority than that to be found under an episcopal government which was yet consistent with a Reformed ideology, an ideology it might be added, which recognized a collective ministry as the leaders of the church. While the document attested to a self-assured clergy which was certain of its role in religious affairs, that self-assurance was, if expressed from an Amesian point of view, attributed tc the fruits of five years experience. There were no references to the nonconformist literature in the "Modell" which could later be used to buttress a mature New England Way. Perhaps reflecting their differences of opinion and the tentative nature of their hypotheses, the clergy relied solely on arguments of practicality and expediency as the rationale for their own authority. The "grounds of these [ministerial] Assemblies" they suggested, were "1. Need of Each others helpe, in regard of dayly Emergent troubles, doubts, and controversies. 2. Love of each others Fellowship. 3. Zeale of Gods glory out of a Publique Spirit to seek the wellfare of all the churches abroad, as well as their own at home... 4. The great blessing and speciall presence of God upon such Assemblies hitherto. 5. The good respect the Elders and Brethren of Churches shall have abroad hereby, by which Communion of love, others shall know they are the disciples of Christ."[54]

As a document indicative of the clergy's transitional mind, the "Modell" reveals what one suspects would be the ministers' primary concern in a fledgling colony. The ministers were anxious that a colony of churches and ministers brought together within the province of one government should demonstrate an ability to function as a unit. A positive indication of their status as a true Christian church was the churches' ability to act in co-operation, demonstrating themselves to be "disciples of Christ." They craved respectability and they took success in their associated undertakings as a sign of divine approbation. Their common experiences were proving to be the touchstone of a viable church discipline. Starting with an assumption that fellowship and constant association were efficacious, the ministers found in the process of handling controversies that a consociational discipline could be made to work. No doubt the works of important divines like Cartwright and Ames were in the back of their minds, but frustrations and trepidation which turned to conviction with success made the ministers more certain that the course they were pursuing was divinely appointed.

It is not surprising therefore, to find that the Salem church was reorganized along lines developed by the "Modell." Recovenanted after Hugh Peter replaced the banished Williams, the church accepted an obligation under the new covenant "to walke with our brethren and sisters in this Congregation with all watchfulnes and tendernes, avoyding all jealousies, suspitions, backbiteing" and other antisocial behavior. Moreover, the church was asked to take a renewed interest in the Bay's community of churches by binding itself to "studdy the advancement of the Gospel in all truth and peace, both in regard of those that are within, or without, noe wae sleighting our sister Churches, but useing theire Counsell as need shalbe."[55]

By comparison to the Salem covenant of 1629, the new covenant stood not only as repudiation of separatism but as an example of the new discipline which had been introduced into the churches within the intervening six years -- consociation. By the very act of recovenanting, the church covenant was also accepted as necessary to church discipline in the Bay colony. In a dramatic anticipation of the recovenanting, Cotton delivered a sermon to the Salem congregation which he prefaced with an admission that

Samuel Skelton and not he had been right in asserting that the church covenant was a proper instrument for organizing a duly constituted church. Unwilling to stop there, however, Cotton continued, issuing a challenge to his colleagues and the churches to look at this Salem covenant as a "new covenant" undertaken by those who were searching for an assurance of their election. Quite simply, Cotton was concerned about the quality of faith to be found among those who inhabited the Bay churches.[56] This question had recently become one of great concern to the ministers. By a law just passed which made it illegal for a church to organize itself without the approbation of ministers and magistrates, the ministers had prevented the reorganization of the Dorchester church under Richard Mather because the ministers believed that the applicants had "builded their comfort of salvation upon unsound grounds."[57]

The implications raised by Cotton's sermon and Dorchester's plight revealed questions which the ministers had not yet considered. They were being asked or were asking themselves to enter the realm of theology and to further delineate the New England Way in terms of faith and creeds. No doubt many ministers had been advancing towards what amounted to a redefinition of admission standards, given the preachers' concern for the corporate faith of their English parishes. But how one should equate faith and fellowship in Bay congregations which limited membership to those within the covenant were matters not yet systematically considered. Thus, by late 1635, the ministers found it necessary to begin a detailed examination of church covenants and their relationship to the faith of the church member. The conclusions they would draw and the manner in which they conducted their discussions were to have a marked effect on the future of the New England Way which they had so patiently developed in practice and theory during the transitional years.

III

Faith, Orthodoxy and
The Church Covenant,
1635--1645

In refusing congregational status to the Dorchester followers of Richard Mather, the clergy advertised their belief in a church ideally composed of the visibly elect. They were to discover, however, that they could not agree upon reliable signs of visibility. In the course of their ensuing deliberations the ministers became overwrought in support of this or that theological proposition which tended to reinforce their understanding of their own particular conversion. Finding it impossible to give theological precision to a religious experience and having mended deep differences among themselves, the clergy began placing considerably more emphasis on forms and procedures. To a very marked extent, such a new emphasis reflected the state of the ministerial community in the colony for the clergy minimized doctrinal uniformity for the sake of clerical solidarity. By the same token, the majority of the ministers found in the church covenant and in covenanted obligations a convenient substitute for a church composed of those with a uniform, experienced faith. Properly speaking, the New England Way could be characterized as a procedural orthodoxy wherein Christian unity was expressed in institutions and in ministerial unity rather than by reference to creeds descriptive of the churches' collective faith. Thus, politics within the ministerial community had a profound effect upon the nature of the New England Way.

The Bay ministers were not perfectionists who believed that a pure church could be erected in this world. From the very beginning, most of them admitted that hypocrites in saints' clothing would be found in their flocks. Yet such realistic views were held by practical idealists who also believed that no efforts should be spared to increase the number of truly elect in their churches. As preachers they had hoped to purify the English church by improving the spiritual integrity of its parishes. In their daily ministrations they had emphasized the techniques employed to increase a believer's assurance, and as disciples of Ames and Perkins they had embraced a theology dedicated to the faith-oriented church.

Ames was popular among the preachers because he defined a congregation in terms of an active and saving faith even while admitting that hypocrites could enter the church. The theologian was sufficiently realistic, for example, to remain within the mainstream of Christian thought be employing a twofold definition of the church. Since Augustine, divines who recognized that organized churches could not be spotless thought in terms of an "invisible" church composed solely of the elect and the mixed and organized visible church which included saints and sinners. For Ames, however, the difference between the visible and the invisible church tended to be a difference of degree rather than of kind, a matter of incongruity within the same species rather than a difference of species. What he called a "true church" or church "mystically considered" was an invisible church whose members were within the covenant of Grace, while his particular or visible church was a mixed congregation of true Christians in covenant with God and of reprobates who were mere professors.[1] The church, ideally considered, was a fellowship of true believers in a covenant of Grace, and it was true believers which the preachers looked for in purified parishes. While hypocrites and the human imperfections of true saints sullied a visible church, making it less than perfect, a true and active faith among church members meant that there was still a considerable congruity between the "true church" and the visible church. It was the tendency among Ames' disciples to maximize through sermons and ministrations the congruity between the visible and the invisible, between faith as expressed by those within the churches and the faith found within the covenant of Grace.[2] Although the Bay ministers realized they could not attain the unattainable, they nevertheless sought a further purification of the colony's churches, discouraging hypocrites and mere professors in an effort to narrow the distance between the true and the visible church.

If there were to be differences of opinion among the Bay preachers, those differences were to concern the degree of congruity between the two covenants and the nature of the faith which made men members of the visible church. What was to be considered legitimate evidence of election in churches ideally composed of visible saints? Should those desiring church membership be expected to evidence their regeneration exclusively in terms of that inward mystical experience which made them part of the church "mystically considered" or would a sanctified life be sufficient evidence of election? In a word, how much and what sort of perfection should be expected in a visible church?

Individual answers to such questions varied with the minister, a corporate answer would depend upon the degree to which the ministers could collectively agree upon an acceptable formulation of visible faith. Each pastor had experienced assurance in a slightly different way. Some still struggled for a definite assurance of their election. A few were mystically inclined while others would stress works and throw open the doors to all but the profligate. While faith as a sign of grace was deemed desirable for members of the Bay's congregations, faith as a dynamic force in the individual and as a factor in congregational fellowship was not so easily defined and therefore difficult to apply as a test of visible sainthood. Agreed that faith was a proper criterion for membership, by 1635 the ministers discovered that they could not agree on what constituted reliable signs of faith which few hypocrites could dissemble.

The question of faith as a criterion for church membership had first been raised when the ministers gathered in February 1635/1636 for the covenanting of Shepard's Cambridge congregation. At that time "Some of the ancient ministers, conferring shortly together" decided "that such as were to join should make confession of their faith, and declare what work of grace the Lord hath wrought in them."[3] Shortly thereafter, the Dorchester group was denied congregational status when it was discovered, upon examining the opinions of the would-be members, that some had determined their assurance of election "upon dreams and ravishes of spirits by fits; others upon the reformation of their lives; others upon duties and performances." The clergy concluded, therefore, that the church members had "never truly closed with Christ (or rather Christ with them) but had made use of him only to help the imperfection of their sanctification and duties; and not made him their sanctification."[4] The "faith" of the Dorchester members ran the gamut of folk religion including that of the village mystic and the pious yeoman. Shepard was among the chief spoilers on this occasion, for he believed that the corporate faith expressed by his own congregation was purer and more sophisticatedly expressed in acceptable, theological parlance than the beliefs of Mather's flock. "Tis not faith [ill perceived] but visible, that must make a visible church, and be the foundation of visible communion" he informed Mather in a solicitous letter of consociational concern. The grounds of faith must be honestly stated and fully understood by a candidate for membership, he continued, because "this place hath discovered more false harts than ever we saw before."[5] Mather, however, was not certain that Shepard understood the difficult trials of the earnest believer. He was more inclined to think that true faith was hidden from the believer than Shepard supposed. " [M]any a man may have faith to salvation" he mused "and not be come to such assurance" of his election as Shepard thought desirable. "A man" he insisted, "may have grace and can not tell how [it] was wrought."[6]

If Mather would demand less initial perfection in church members, Cotton was in the process of defining a visible church in more stringent terms than either of his colleagues. In his 1636 sermon at Salem Cotton insisted that only those truly faithful within the covenant of Grace who were also in a covenanted relationship with one another could expect to receive the benefits of the church -- baptism and the Lord's Supper.[7] As applied in his sermon, Cotton's doctrine strongly implied that the church covenant was in important ways to be thought of as congruent with the covenant of Grace. The Boston pastor chose this occasion to remind the Salem church of certain obligations which it should seriously consider when it was recovenanted. Membership under the original covenant had been derived from a "covenant of works" for formerly the Salem church members had simply agreed to confess their sins and act more circumspectly in the future. Cotton asked that they now embrace a "new covenant" and seek their assurance of election in a religious experience and a purified faith. Otherwise you who have never "yet laid hold upon Christ, with a true justifying Faith; such an one will not continue in Gods house for ever." In trying to narrow the distance between the two covenants, Cotton issued a challenge to his colleagues to take this "new covenant" more seriously. A simple profession of faith and a confession of sins was but an old covenant, a covenant of works. "Build a Church upon any other foundation but Faith, and the profession of Faith, and it will break into maniford distempers. But if the Church be built upon this Rock; Storms and Wind will not so much as shake it, it being built upon Faith, and Faith upon Christ Jesus: by this means the [church] Covenant will keep us constantly, sweetly and fruitfully, in an everlasting kind of Serviceable-usefulness one to another."[8]

A sound doctrine, the ministers no doubt concluded, a timely reminder that justification is by faith and not by works as the papists believed. But within a year the ministers and the colony would be bitterly divided over the meaning and application of Cotton's terminology.

In new Boston as in old, Cotton preached a doctrine which emphasized faith as the fruit of a cataclysmic experience; doubts, for Cotton, could not be alleviated short of a psychological crisis. Such a doctrine was, of course, suited to Cotton's own spiritual needs for he was still in an unsettled spiritual estate. "God hath so often Exercised me with renewed Feares and Agonyes about mine own Spiritual Estate, and the estate of some others Depending on me, that I could not rest mine owne Spirit upon every signe thereof" he observed to Samuel Stone; he was forced to search more deeply for a satisfying inner experience. Understandably the Boston pastor was sympathetic towards those other colonists, especially those in his own congregation, who sought what he called a "further Annoynment of the Spirit", that is an inner experience which could be a final assurance in a believer beset by doubts about his election.[9]

If Cotton's own spiritual crisis made him sensitive to the plight of others, he was also interested in preventing bad doctrine from being preached in the churches. It "is the desire of my heart by the grace of [God] ," he observed in assessing his motives, "to provoke Christians (in this countrey of universal professein) not to rest in any such changes or graces, or Deutyes or ordinances (as Church-fellowship etc) as may Leave them short of saveing fellowship with Jesus Christ." Though Cotton wished to avoid all controversy with his colleagues, he did feel that church members were too interested in performing the obligations found within the church covenant and too little concerned with finding assurance within the covenant of Grace. For his part, he was not certain that "the common graces, and gifts of temporary believers" were substantially different than the sanctification experienced by true saints. Thus, "I would not wish christians to build the signes of their Adoption upon any sanctification, but such as floweth from faith in Christ Jesus."[10]

Assurance for Cotton was by way of an absolute "promise" whereby "the soule being emptied of himself, now the Holy Ghost hath infused Faith to receive the Lord Jesus Christ." This doctrine, developed at some length in the 1640's by the Boston divine, was meant to stress the passivity of the human being during election. If election was determined solely by the will of God, and if man could do nothing to evidence his election until faith was forthcoming, then man could but be the passive member of the covenanted relationship with God. Cotton distrusted faith which might contain a trace of human effort, and argued that man could not even be active in receiving faith which was bestowed upon him as a fruit of the covenant of Grace. The Boston divine was convinced that he was correct in this assumption, for he believed himself to be doing no more than elucidating the phenomenon of "Passive Reception" which was described in the works of "Dr. Ames."[11] "If closing with Christ be a good fruit" of the covenant of Grace, he observed in a manuscript treatise written during the controversy with his colleagues, "wee must be good Trees before wee can bring it forth." In sum, Cotton distrusted sanctification as a sign of election and stressed the inner experience found in passive Christians who wait for the ultimate assurance. To see the regenerative process in any other way, he observed to one correspondent, was to "Invert a Branch or twig of the Covenant of Grace (by letting the Light of Workes before the Light of Christ)."[12]

Preaching from the most important pulpit in the colony, Cotton with the aid of a growing following in his and other churches precipitated a major religious crisis in the colony. Though Cotton remained within conventional theological boundaries, his Antinomian followers led by parishioner Anne Hutchinson, turned the colony upside down with her two propositions "That the person of the Holy Ghost dwells in a justified person" and "That no sanctification can help to evidence to us our justification."[13] Such theological slogans stimulated considerable debate among laymen and triggered a psychic crisis in many of the faithful. It was within the power of these simplified ideas to challenge the grounds of a person's assurances of faith depending on whether or not he knew himself justified because of his pious demeanor. For a few colonists the result was disastrous; for others, the natural reaction was to bring into question those who challenged the grounds of their being.

Governor Winthrop, for one, was upset by the doctrine of his minister. But while he might bluster in public about those whose doctrine would separate faith and good behavior, he had to come to terms with his own conscience newly awakened by Cotton's preaching. "The Doctrine of free justification lately taught here took me in as drowsy a condition as I had been in (to my remembrance)" and almost toppled Winthrop's self-assurance before he became convinced, by a detailed examination of his entire adult history, that he was among the elect.[14] One Cotton parishioner seeking assurance to the point of distraction exchanged an uncertain election for certain damnation by dropping her child into a well. A nonchurch member from Weymouth became so disturbed that, in a "troubled mind," he sat bolt upright in bed shouting "Art thou come, Lord Jesus" and ran from the house to his death in the bitter cold.[15] The psychic crisis affected all strata of society. Some would be permanently lost to the churches and the colony as they came to trust in that sort of inner experience of the Holy Spirit which led them eventually to embrace Quakerism. Others, like the minister Samuel Whiting, would be forced back into that indeterminate state where election was uncertain and, turning to Cotton for help, lament that his "hopes had been built upon the Sand rather than the rock."[16]

By questioning the way in which assurance was perceived, Cotton threatened the very being of those ministers and laymen who saw their assurance in nonmystical terms. Understandably they tried to discredit his doctrine. Thomas Shepard, for one, wrote to Cotton in late 1635 or early 1636 after attending a Thursday lecture and asked "Whether a Christian finding a qualification of a promise savingly wrought in him; can or should lay hold or close with the Lord Jesus according to the promise?" In addition, he wondered "Whether this revelation of the Spirit is a thing beyound and above the word; and whether tis safe so to say?" Shepard suspected the doctrine of indwelling and the implication that assurance was to be found in ways other than the traditional channels such as an understanding of the scripture (the word) or by reference to an improved life.[17] The Cambridge' pastor's interests were far from academic. It was during this period of his life that Shepard was undergoing the most agonizing doubts about his own election. So severe was his depression that "When I was sick over night in my bed on the morning I saw my life a vapour and bubble a vanity and all my righteousness the flower that fades."[18] In such spiritual crises, Shepard looked for the tangible, for the conditional promises to be found in the word and in activity. After several more years of searching he would finally discover an assurance based upon a "faith ... set out by gladly receiving the woord so that it was no sinfull end but woord to which they desire the soules and harts might be united." Adherence to works as signs of election was improper but effort expended to find faith through an understanding of the word was an activity worthy of a saint seeking his election. In the end, Shepard observed, such a faith was "yet set all on woorke."

Where Cotton opted for passivity in the truly faithful, Shepard advocated activity. The latter preached mortification of the individual believing that man should not deduce election from a smug and pious demeanor. Yet once mortification had been accomplished one must "performe dutyes ... to carry thee to Jesus Christ." "Heare a Sermon to carry thee to Jesus Christ: fast and pray, and get a full tide of affections in them to carry thee to the Lord Jesus Christ, to get love to him more acquaintance with him, more union with him: so sorrow for thy sins, that thou mayest be more fitted for Christ."[19] And if Shepard abhored smugness he loved sincerity. Thus, his "Sincere Convert" (to use a term which was the title of his important work on conversion) avoided hypocrisy by improving upon his sincerity, whereas Cotton's convert escaped hypocrisy by a passive reception of faith and an inner experience.

Generally speaking the doctrine of Shepard (who was Cotton's chief critic in ministerial meetings) was more acceptable to the majority of the ministers. Peter Bulkley, for example, reaped his harvests of converts by preaching humiliation and subjection to the "will of God" as preparation for entrance into the covenant of Grace.[20] An anonymous minister related activity and the covenant even more directly in a sermon delivered at the height of the controversy when he insisted that "The promises of life and salvation and all good things are made to those that doe."[21] Mather made substantially the same equation of activity and assurance by relating the ethic of labor to the covenant of Grace: "labor to the good evidence of God's favor."[22] Though careful to avoid advocating justification by works, Cotton's colleagues tried to equate justification with a style of assurance soundly rooted in a religious experience which was demonstrable by pious means. Shepard, Mather, Weld, Eliot, Wilson, John Allin and John Phillips tried, for example, in a public pronouncement to deliver a balanced view of assurance. "The most vytall testimony of the Spirit" they declared in discussing the controversial idea of indwelling "is togither with our spirits or by the sight of graces."[23]

If some divines stressed the relatively objective evidence to be found in sanctification, others inclined towards a rationalistic interpretation of assurance. Ralph Leveritch of Sandwich preached that "there is no saving sight of sin or Christ, but in and by the word." The "word" Leveritch considered a "light" that "makes things visible to the understanding or mind, which is the eye of the soule." If Leveritch inclined towards a rational assurance, Samuel Stone, Hooker's colleague at New Haven, was even more insistent in his belief that "Faith in God ... is conscience grounded upon knowledge."[24] Depending upon the degree to which a clergyman believed assurance was rationally or irrationally received, to that degree he was willing to acknowledge that sermons and the study of scripture were an efficacious part of the regenerative process. Cotton, for example, would admit at most that when the covenant of Grace was properly preached from the pulpit the Holy Ghost delighted to concur (though independently) with a minister in bringing a sinner to an understanding of his estate. George Phillips, on the other hand, assured himself that he was indispensable to the spiritual welfare of his flock by making a case for the ministry and committing it to his private notebook. Though not the cause of faith, Phillips noted, ministers are tender gardeners who "soweth the seed of the word whereby when the inward efficacy and power of the Spirit commenceth unto us, we are received and quickened to a Spiritual use."[25]

In the initial confrontation between Mather and Shepard over the Dorchester congregation and in the hair-splitting debates which followed it is apparent that Cotton's opponents were not agreed among themselves. At such times as these the human vocabulary and mind were incapable of fathoming the totality of faith as it was expressed by various church members. Words and phrases meant to enlighten the ministers and their parishioners proved opaque upon examination. But as Cotton emerged in opposition to his colleagues' use of "sanctification" in their ministrations, the theological controversy generated key propositions which separated the ministers into distinguishable factions. As characterized by one contemporary observer, three propositions distinguished those ministers whose collective views placed them at certain points along a recognizable theological spectrum. At one end was Thomas Hooker who, rumor had it, removed to Connecticut in 1636 in part because of his differences with Cotton and the rest of the clergy. Hooker was more liberal than his colleagues for he would have extended the church covenant to include the competent professor who might not have a strong, experienced faith. He insisted that worshipping within the covenant was "useful to them and Theirs" otherwise undistinguished by an experienced faith.[26] He may well have been joined in this opinion by Warham who, like Hooker, migrated to Connecticut. For, it was Warham who, among the early ministers, had insisted upon the mixed nature of the visible church. The specific difference between Hooker and a majority of ministers concerned the "ea [s] ing preparation in a Christian soule before his [union] with Christ" in the covenant of Grace. The rest of the clergy would give no such hostage to human endeavor, although they did join Hooker in opposition to Cotton by insisting that the fruit of the covenant could be measured by Christian endeavor. This middle position on the spectrum was characterized by the proposition "That a man may prove his justification by his works of sanctification, as the first, best and only chief evidence of his salvation." Cotton, of course, was at the opposite end of the spectrum from Hooker, being diametrically opposed to any human activity and stressing passivity.[27]

Cotton tried to make light of these differences, insisting that such divisions in the colony as were precipitated by the ministerial controversy reflected a limited difference of opinion "amongst us ... about magnifying the grace of God; one party seeking to advance the grace of God within us, and the other to advance the grace of God towards us, (meaning by the one justification, and by the other sanctification)." Yet, though such differences when abstractly considered were minor theological differences among a school of covenant theologians, "it began to be as common here to distinguish between men, by being under a covenant of grace or a covenant of works" complained the governor, "as in other countries between Protestants and papists."[28]

Faith proved a divisive rather than a unifying element in the churches when the nature of assurance and the meaning of the covenant of Grace were so widely misunderstood (or should we say differently perceived) and disputed. Theological propositions might play a part in the education of the minister and in giving him a theological identity, but theology had a limited application among Christians whose individual faith was a unique expression of a distinct personality. Faith as experienced and perceived was a volatile substance. Thus the ministerial controversy divided churches, produced factions in the ministerial community and in the General Court, and disrupted family relations. The result of gathering unknown quantities into tight-knit fellowships, this larger or "antinomian controversy" triggered a wave of religious enthusiasm replete with catch-phrases staunchly maintained by laymen-turned-theologians. The variety of opinions held by the populace suggests a range of popular religious beliefs which make it difficult to assume that anything more than a superficial orthodoxy was imposed upon the congregations by the theologically sophisticated ministers.[29] The ministers were ridiculed as so many educated "legall Preachers, Baals Priests, ... Scribes, Pharisees" while the socially inferior (so their self-styled superiors insisted) rode a popular wave of "pride, insolency, contempt of authority, divisions and sedition" which threatened to undermine the foundations of church and state. In the popular mind the hiatus between the covenant of works and the covenant of Grace meant that morality and obedience to religious canons and civil law had absolutely no bearing upon salvation. Antinomians who held such a view accused the Bay ministers of "preaching out of the Law and the Prophets," while one malcontent observed that "I have not heard a pure Gospell Sermon from any of them." A life of piety was contrasted with a life of "free grace" whereby a man could become a "new creature" shunning duties to wait for the "in-dwelling of the Spirit of Christ."[30]

Here was congregationalism run amuck, a scattered community of churches divided where several years before the ministers had optimistically believed that their unity had proved them to be "disciples of Christ." Pastor Wilson "made a very sad speach" in the General Court, insisting that there was an "inevitable danger of separation, if these differences and alienations among brethren were not speedily remedied."[31] In such circumstances unity in and among the churches, ministry and government was a most necessary antidote to the widespread unrest. Accordingly the instruments of consociation were brought into play in a series of private ministerial meetings and in a synod called for August of 1637.

The ministers, for their part, sought to settle their differences in a series of meetings conducted intermittently between October of 1636 and 1637. During this period they exchanged two sets of questions with Cotton and elicited his favorable response to queries which could bring them together. But the Boston minister held his ground, referring to the queries as so many "interrogatories" and likening himself to Christ confronted by the "High priest."[32] Though he admitted that "you are much dearer and precious to me than the High priest was to Him," he insisted upon maintaining his own unique doctrine. Thus Cotton could not concur with his colleagues in three propositions which proved, after long debate, to be the sum of their differences. He would not admit that there were "gracious condicions or qualifications" which might be perceived by the regenerate "before Faith." Nor would he concur with his colleagues' suggestion that the regenerate could find his "first Assurance of Faith from Sanctification." Finally, he would not admit that the regenerate had an active faith by which he could be a party to his own "Christian conversion."[33]

When all was said and done, the majority of the Bay ministers were typically Puritan preachers who were Calvinists in the study and Arminians in the pulpit. The clergy was determined to find a formulation of assurance by which the average sincere, earnest, and pious church member could find some hint of election in his average, day to day existence. Cotton, on the other hand, was an oddity, a scholar who was a Calvinist in both study and pulpit, a Christian who had experienced his election (or was trying to re-experience his election) ultimately by means of that inner experience of infused grace. When his colleagues accused him of doctrinal innovation he easily found them wanting as Calvinist theologians. His position, he insisted, was as old as "Augustine's doctrine of Conversion, that it is of Grace and not of free will; Luther's doctrine of Justification, that it is of Grace and not of Workes; Calvin's doctrine of Predestination, that it is of Grace and not of faith or works forseen ... And surely for the Doctrine in hand, Calvin is as clear as mine hearts desire to God."[34]

Because the doctrinal differences were viewed by the clergy as fundamental, the clergy's vaunted ideal of Christian unity was put to a severe test. In the events which followed the confrontation of Cotton and his colleagues, however, that ideal prevented a more severe breach in the ministerial community. While Cotton and some of his congregation boycotted the gathering of Peter Bulkley's Concord congregation, Cotton wrote to the Concord pastor insisting that "The Right hand of his [Christ's] Fellowship is able to bring mighty things to passe ... that wee and all our fellow brethren may (in his name) [sett] forward the Lord's worke with one shoulder."[35] In the May meetings Cotton also tried to reduce their differences to a "very narrow scantling; and Mr. Shepard preaching at the day of election, brought them yet nearer." Except for those who "knew the botton of the tenets of those of the other party," observed Winthrop, "few could see where the difference was; and indeed it seemed so small, as (if men's affections had not been formerly alienated, when the differences were formerly stated as fundamental) they might easily have come to reconciliation." The ministers generally agreed that justification and sanctification "were both together in time" and that an inner experience was always accompanied with "a word and a work." Yet they could not decide "whether a man could have any true assurance, without sight of some such work in his soule as no hypocrite could attain unto."[36] The ministers held their ground for they were not certain that Cotton's doctrine was meant as a hedge against hypocrisy so much as it was a plea for mysticism. The Boston minister tried to assure his colleagues that he bore no taint of the Antinomian heresy, but all the while his parishioners told the other ministers that "no matter ... what you heare him say in publick: we know what he saith in private."[37]

By August of 1637 and the synod the ministers were determined to present a united front and settle their differences with the Boston pastor "in a private and brotherly way." Cotton saw this move as a display of mutual trust in the ministerial community nurtured by "our clear understanding of one anothers minds and judgement" and by "an amiable and comfortable Communion [of ministers] ... in a brotherly kindness."[38] There the controversy was to stand. While the ministers recemented the relations in their association, they had to resort to an ambiguous formulation in the synod which was meant to appeal to both parties. The "consent was," noted Winthrop, "that some saving sanctifications (as faith, etc.) were coexistant, concurrent, and coapparent (or at least might be) with the witness of the Spirit always."[39]

The formulation satisfied no one, yet the ministers had weathered a crisis, keeping their community from dissolution by accomodation and reconciliation. The clergy courted accord for the sake of accord and emulated the forms of concordance at times when thological differences provided no grounds for agreement. If they could not agree upon a uniform definition of faith, they nevertheless achieved a unity among themselves by resorting to the device of "nonfundamentals." Henceforth opinions which were not believed fundamental to a church's stability were to be considered insufficient reason for a person to leave the fellowship. At the same time the ministers and magistrates persuaded Cotton, who had contemplated a departure for New Haven, that a "removall upon such differences was unwelcome."[40] Practically speaking, "nonfundamentals" were matters which could not be defined by common consent. Cotton himself reflected this position in several treatises written after the controversy, one of which was addressed to the subject of the "new covenant." All of the churches, he insisted, professed "Union with Christ, and evidencing of Union by the same Spirit, and the same Faith and the same holiness: though some may conceive the Union wrought in giving the habit, and others rather refer it to the act." There was, in essence, some measure of agreement among the clergy who believed that faith itself was the proper criterion for membership in the churches. How that faith was evidenced and whether it was efficacious in uniting with God, however, were moot questions. Cotton was ready to admit that sanctification might well be an assurance of election though "to distinguish in men between that Sanctification which floweth from the Law, and that which is of the Gospel, is a matter so narrow, that the Angels in Heaven have much adoe to discern who differ."[41] To debate such matters any further, he continued, was "a work fitter for Angels to cut the scantling in it, then for the Ministers of the Gospel."

New England did not become a theological no-man's land, nor did the clergy sanction heterodoxy because of their unsettled differences. They agreed upon general propositions which had first been suggested when Shepard's congregation was organized but gave up celestial politics and made the most of their common ideals. Whereas Cotton publicly challenged his colleagues during the Salem sermon in 1636, he became more discreet after his falling out with the other ministers. He readily confessed in a sermon delivered in 1639 that he hesitated to clear up a point publicly raised in his congregation on a certain Sunday "becawse I was not able to clear up the objection to my selfe." During the week preceding the sermon, however, he had an opportunity to meet with "all the Devynes" and when the doubt was cleared up to the satisfaction of the group "I thought good now to Impart it to yow by way of Addition [.] "[42] Interestingly enough, the very differences which had so exercised the ministers and which individual ministers after the controversy settled for themselves in a number of separately published treatises were not set down without some further effort at an accomodation of the diverse views. Peter Bulkley, for example, held a considerable correspondence with Cotton before his The Gospel-Covenant was published.[43]

By such means the clergy nurtured the myth of clerical solidarity which was considered an important source of religious uniformity in the colony. Thomas Allin and Thomas Shepard staunchly defended the ministerial community in New England, insisting in the face of Presbyterian criticism that "Although Satan hath been oft busie to make breaches among us, yet the ministers of Christ have been hitherto generally (if not all) of one heart and mind in the maine and principall things of his Kingdom amongst us." Granted that differences do arise, the ministers never disagreed but the differences were soon resolved. If not of one mind "before they convened together, yet they never yet met, but grace hath over-wrested corruption; peace, trouble; and truth, errour: and so have most sweetly accorded in one."[44]

Ideally considered, differences of opinion should be interpreted (the clergy believed) as only a prelude to concord, while debate was thought an instrument for accord. In point of fact, dissent played an important function in clerical councils. The clergy were, however, not so self-assured that they could accept dissension as a sort of creative tension among themselves and within the churches. It was expected that differences in the ministerial community would be conducted amiably. To a certain extent, therefore, the clergy's obsessive preoccupation with concord helped to make the myth of clerical solidarity self-fulfilling. When insoluble differences such as those concerning the covenant of Grace threatened the ministerial community's disruption, the clergy artfully pursued unity of purpose rather than uniformity of opinion within their ranks.

The nature of dogmatic unity as seen by the Bay ministers was further developed in two assertions which they made in answer to queries sent them by English colleagues puzzled by the recent disturbances. "Unity and verity" in the Bay colony, the Bay clergy suggested, was to proceed from a united ministry and "the Commandment of God to bee of one mind and one judgement in the truth." As for particular instruments of unity:

> The consociation of Churches into Classes and Synods we hold to be lawfull and in some cases necessary; as namely in things that are not peculiar to one Church, but common to them all: and likewise when a Church is not able to end any matter that concerns only themselves, they are to seek for counsell and advice from neighbor Churches, as the Church at Antioch did send unto the Church at Jerusalem.

They considered the works of William Ames as the rationale for this type of classical authority, and like Ames they would limit synodical authority to a "Doctrinal power," "a power of rebuking ... false teachers." "We understand" this power, suggested Richard Mather in another work, as the power "to clear up the truth dogmatically."[45]

Nevertheless a basic assumption restricted the area in which dogmatic uniformity was applicable. It is not certain whether it was pressed upon them by the circumstances of their theological quarrels during the late 1630's. In either case, by 1639 the ministers insisted that they were actually wary of a uniform dogma applied in the churches. While they assumed that the general precepts by which the Reformed churches, for instance, expressed a common profession of faith might well be ratified in New England in a "Platform of Doctrine and Discipline", they opposed "a binding Rule of Faith and practice" imposed upon the churches by an outside authority. Such platforms were not desirable because "faith may by this meanes stand in the wisedom or will of men rather than in the power of God, as if men had dominion over their faith." Platforms rigidly applied curtailed human freedom to experiment, "to search the Scriptures, and try all things" in the quest for a personal understanding of regeneration. If the clergy feared that an overdefined faith could be substituted for experienced faith by the individual, they also concluded that if a platform "be any meanes of unity, yet it may be a dangerous hindrance of some verity and degree of truth as binding men to rest in their former apprehensions and knowledge, without liberty to better their judgement in those points, and shutting the doore against any further light which God may give to his best servants, and most discerning, beyond what they saw at first."[46] The whole tenor of the clergy's statement suggests their appreciation for an experimental faith and a doctrinal flexibility which would safeguard it.

The lessons to be learned from several years of protracted controversy were clear: Intangible religious experiences could not be paraphrased. A church could not be established on both a creedal and a mystical basis. Entering the province of the individual personality, the clergy had found that the manifestations of faith were highly subjective. Saving grace could not accurately be measured because the clergy could not agree upon a precise delineation in the abstract. The ministers had recourse to no objective evidence for their assertion upon the subject but relied almost solely upon self-knowledge and upon knowledge gleaned from those who had experienced regeneration under their tuteledge. Each preacher interpreted the narrow path to salvation as the one which he personally had trod. It was only the rapport between the minister and his congregation which made possible even a limited objectification of the experience of saving grace.

Such a view meant, however, that the all important question of admission procedures and the general basis for church membership was still unanswered. Faith was not to be defined by creeds and yet it could not be left to the imagination of the individual. The answer was to subordinate faith to the church covenant. This is not to say that the ministers were any less enthusiastic about a congregation composed of visible saints. They did, however, abandon experimental faith as the real criterion for church membership and substitute tests and obligations which would make the church member a functional member under the covenant.

This changing emphasis can be seen, for example, in the organization of the Dedham congregation in 1638. The gathered ministers insisted that they were present merely to prevent gross heresies and improprieties. While the ministers felt it necessary to give "some loving exhortation in respect of some passages professed by some of the the brethren" in the proposed fellowship, they were far more concerned that the proposed congregation ensure its own future cohesion. Noting that those who proposed to join in a covenant had made a thorough preparation by examining the opinions and demeanor of the prospective church members, the ministers insisted that the future church members have a mutual faith in each other's integrity and only inquired "whether we found our harts closing together in such brotherly affections as was meete in the Lord."[47]

In seeking stable congregations where cohesion was encouraged by a mutual understanding of faith among the church members, the clergy found it necessary to place increasing emphasis upon formal church covenants, for mutual trust derived from formal obligations under the covenant was deemed more important when faith was subject to a variety of interpretations. Richard Mather, speaking for the elders in 1639, was in the unenviable position of insisting that present circumstances required a more vigorous use of church covenants than was warranted by the vague references to covenants found in scripture. He was forced to argue, for example, that Old Testament covenants were "types and figures, signifying the like things concerning the people of God in these latter days." The "New Testament hath nothing to the contrary" he insisted, and therefore moral equity and reason provided a convenient rationale for the use of the covenant. What the ministers were saying through Mather was that in a rapidly growing colony (16,000 inhabitants in ten years) where the faith of a prospective church member was an unknown quantity in terms both of quality and emotional content, it was necessary to organize churches upon a more secure basis.[48] Mather argued that the covenant had great organizational value. It prevented breaches and factions in the churches, and it provided for the mutual edification of church members. As a public promise, the covenant created mutual obligations among church members to proceed in church matters with a spirit of unity. Finally the covenanted congregation was a "body incorporate", a society with power and jurisdiction over its members.[49] Mather made substantially the same point in another treatise written on behalf of the clergy. The covenant, he insisted, was a "convenient means" of controlling admission to the churches. Since men should know the grounds of their faith before partaking of the ordinances and "knowing how easily such men if they were admitted [without examination] might infect others, and perhaps destroy the Faith of some" the covenant was a necessary part of the Bay church system.[50]

As students of Ames the clergy previously found no great need to rely on explicit covenants. But as clergymen responsible for the internal tranquility deemed essential in a colony where heterdox views abounded, they saw the covenant as the only fitting way to organize churches which could rule by the consent of those it disciplined. The clergy was becoming preoccupied with ecclesiastical authority and questions of jurisdiction, as a conference between them and Robert Lenthall, a student of Ames, readily demonstrated. Lenthall was a nonconformist preacher recently arrived in the colony who refused to acknowledge church covenants or to receive ordination at the hands of his congregation. For Lenthall a church was a congregation of the faithful and therefore he could find no reason to think of a church as essentially a covenanted congregation. Cotton, as moderator of this particular ministerial meeting, informed the new minister that "From the constitution [covenant] doth flow Jurisdiction. For in all relations a covenant is the foundation. I have no power over my wife, nor servant but by covenant. The magistrate hath no power over me, but by my consent. So in the Church, the Covenant is the foundation of that relation and power we have over one another: which you deny." Lenthall's interpretation of the visible church reflected an Amesian view of the church. "There is a Covenant in Scripture," he insisted, "and the Covenant of Grace, which give the first Being to a church." Cotton would no longer conclude, as he had previously and as Lenthall did on this occasion, that a group of faithful Christians within the covenant of Grace could meet and therefore be a church by virtue of an implied covenant. Neither simply meeting together nor the covenant of Grace (which can be found in any congregation) gives "an essential being to a church, but it is their mutual covenant one with another, that gives the first being to a church." Speaking for himself and his colleagues, Cotton gave a new twist to the old Amesian view of the church: "that which doth not give them Jurisdiction or power over one another, makes them not a Church by divine right."[51]

Whereas divines such as Cotton and Davenport had once thought of particular churches primarily in terms of faith, the needs of organization was forcing them to redefine a properly constituted church thereby making a distinction between a church of the faithful under the covenant of Grace and an organized church based upon a specific covenant. This departure was of such great consequence that the ministers were forced to lament that "Some of us when we were in England through the mercie of God, did see the necessity of Church-Covenant; and did also preach it to the people amongst whom we ministred, though neither so soone nor so fully as were meete, for which we have cause to be humbled, and to judge our selves before the Lord."[52] Taken at its face value, this statement would suggest only an increased emphasis upon covenants. In light of the conference with Lenthall however, it is apparent that questions of jurisdictions and the controversy over faith had prompted the greater concern for covenants. Mather, speaking on behalf of the clergy, had yet one more reason for their shifting opinion, a reason which went to the very heart of the controversy which had made the ministers so conscious of jurisdictional questions. In 1636 Thomas Shepard had insisted upon a clearly perceived, visible faith as necessary for a well-knit congregation and suggested that so many "false hearts" made a clear understanding of faith all the more necessary. Mather, on the other hand, made a forthright defense of covenants *vis a vis* faith which reflected the recent clerical tribulations. Covenants were the only reliable way of creating churches, he insisted in 1639, "because there is nothing else without this joyning in Covenant, that can sufficiently distinguish them [church members] ; It is not Faith and Grace in their hearts, for some men are members of the visible Church, and yet have no Grace, and others may have Grace and yet be no members and therefore this is not the thing that doth distinguish them."[53]

The net effect of these several rationalizations of the church covenant was to make a fundamental distinction between a congregation of the faithful and a covenanted congregation wherein the covenanted relationship was considered the appropriate way of distinguishing a properly constituted church. In matters of faith and jurisdiction there was considerable incongruity between a congregation within the covenant of Grace and a covenanted congregation. Once this fact was established in the clergy's minds it was possible to take another step and define "faith" under the church covenant as something different from though related to the saving faith under the covenant of Grace, in other words, to emphasize an even greater incongruity between the two covenants for organizational purposes. Peter Bulkley ventured in this direction only to have doubts planted in his mind by the intrepid Cotton. "Whether those only that are in covenant and doe evidence a work of grace, are to be received to all ordinances is with me a very doubtful question" he observed to George Phillips in 1638. But Bulkley hesitated, asking a question of Phillips which Cotton had no doubt asked Bulkley: "But where is true conversion and faith professed" otherwise than within the church covenant?[54] Thomas Allen would answer that question by ignoring conversion as a criterion for membership. He wrote to Cotton in 1642 to suggest that he (Allen) thought it unnecessary to demand a relation of regeneration from prospective church members "Seeing there [is] no expressed example for it in scripture."[55] Allen's formulation, were it adopted in the congregations, would fundamentally alter the churches because it completely denied the evangelical fellowship which was at the heart of the preachers' program. John Eliot's speculative mind may well have been wrestling with the question of faith under the covenant and its proper profession at this time. Given an opportunity a few years later to express his thoughts on the subject, Eliot suggested that a church should be considered as having an inner and outer fellowship, a "twofold communion" with an inner, covenanted group of the faithful which would allow the larger church "to keepe the whole heape of chaff and corne together."[56]

It was John Norton of Ipswich, however, who in his *The Answer* developed a formulation of faith under the covenant which the majority of clergymen could understand and were willing to ratify. Understandably it was a formulation which reflected the clergy's theological disputes of the late 1630's and which fastened upon the church covenant as a substitute for a congregation of the truly faithful. Quite simply, Norton's formulation reflected the entire ten years of clerical disputes (*The Answer* was published in 1645) in which a majority of ministers had stood opposed to the doctrine of Cotton. It is not surprising, therefore, that Cotton (and, Cotton insisted, a few other ministers) stood opposed to Norton's work on certain questions, seeing in it a departure from the ideal of a congregation of the faithful because *The Answer* made a "distinction between the covenant of Grace and the church covenant."[57]

In making this distinction between the two covenants, Norton insisted that "A person may be admitted into the communion of the external visible church who is not endowed with the real internal holiness of regeneration and with justifying faith in Christ." Where once the clergy had debated the merits of a visible sanctification as evidence of justification, they now would bypass the entire question by no longer making justification absolutely necessary for membership in the churches. "He who is admitted to the external communion of the church professes the name of Christ, is separated from the world by external and covenanted holiness (the kind which is properly recognized by common sense and formally inheres in the church covenant itself) and is endowed with a knowledge of God, true religion and a character of purity without scandal in his outward life."[58]

Ames, of course, had recognized that hypocrites and mere professors could be found in the churches. Yet his faith-oriented theology would scarcely have sanctioned so blatant a definition of sainthood which described hypocrisy as "covenanted holiness." And where once the Bay ministers had hoped that saints would seek their assurance within the covenant of Grace as a sign of their holiness, they now saw in the church covenant itself a sort of surrogate holiness which sufficed for purposes of organization. By 1645 the clergy (or at least a majority of them) had resorted to stressing externals and in so doing admitted an even larger incongruity between the ideal church whose members were within the covenant of Grace and a New England congregation whose members received a substitute holiness within the covenant of the church. Thus Norton's definition of a visible saint dealt entirely with externals. Holiness was not necessarily to be found in the believer; he received holiness by cleaving to the covenant for sufficient holiness was inherent in the church covenant. Faith, meanwhile, was to consist of four particulars for purposes of admission: a confession of objective faith; a declaration of "experienced faith" as an event, "even though the inward side of the event in a person cannot be known to others"; a life without scandal; and "A witnessing commitment to the Gospel of Christ and his kingdom."[59]

"The church" Norton continued, "by the act of admitting a member does not testify that the person admitted is actually faithful, but that he is faithful to the church." In one phrase Norton succinctly expressed the changed opinion of a majority of the clergy. The type of faith which was to be looked for in candidates was no longer to be defined in mystical terms but solely by reference to externals and to those objectifiable characteristics of experimental faith, by faith in the efficacy of the covenant, by a candidate's willingness to undertake the obligations imposed by the covenant. The utmost charity was to be extended to the candidate, Norton insisted, so that "in the doubtful case, where evil is not apparent and there are favorable evidences, to incline to an approved estimate of a person, and in a negative way and for practical purposes take him for the better, so that at least, in the first place, we do not judge ill of a neighbor, and in the second place, act toward him in common relationships as if he were honest." So far as the candidate could acknowledge a saving experience of regeneration, Norton deemed it sufficient that he be tested "By a profession of faith, ... and a confession of sins, that is, in substance, of the work of experienced faith."[60]

In seeking the certainties of a covenanted city upon a hill, the majority of the clergy de-emphasized a faith-oriented citadel for the surer community of covenanted relationships. This by no means meant a de-emphasis of the conversional experience which was the preacher's chief delight and his alternative to the torpid English faith found in the average parish. Yet while faith within the covenant of Grace was the chief concern of church members and had originally been proposed by the clergy as the ideal towards which the churches should strive, a covenanted faith and a covenanted holiness together with the obligations imposed by the covenant became a second-best approximation of invisible faith. While an experienced faith may not have waned in the churches, the ardor of Puritan idealism had cooled perceptibly by 1645. Yet one cannot help but wonder whether an increased emphasis upon externals and covenanted obligations did not avert the eyes of the church members from that "further assurance" which Cotton preached as an alternative to the complacency which he saw in those who relished their obligations within the covenant. Certainly the ministers were striving to provide a place for these mere professors in their covenant theology. Thomas Hooker had seemingly departed from the Bay in 1635 a minority of one in his support for the mere professor. By 1645 he had his delicious revenge, for in publishing his views on the particular church he was able to proclaim that his opinions reflected "the joint judgement of all the Elders upon the [Connecticut] river, of New Haven, Guilford, Milford, Stratford, Fairfield and of most of the Elders of the Churches in the Bay. ... At a common meeting I was desired by them all, to publish what now I do."[61] In treating the Covenant of Grace, Hooker, like the majority of his colleagues, seized upon the distinction between internals and externals in matters of faith insisting that those professing Christians who had not experienced saving faith were externally related to God through the covenant while true believers enjoyed the internal relationship which Ames had reserved for the elect.[62]

Though Cotton recognized the emerging doctrine as inimical to his own views, he had the good grace to put a charitable construction upon the contrary views of his colleagues. Speaking for himself and those few other ministers who could not concur with Norton in his treatment of the two covenants he wrote an accomodative preface to The Answer complimenting the divine for his synthesis of "the separate points of our thought." Noting some disagreement among the ministers, he nevertheless suggested that "since there is among us all sufficient agreement about these things in faith and practice, we have followed the plain teaching of God not only to take with serenity our differences of opinion about them, but to embrace heartily as beloved brethren in Christ, those who are as devoted to the works of the Lord as we are."[63]

Cotton did not have to fear either the censure of his colleagues or their interference in his church; as a consequence, it was quite easy for him to reassert the myth of clerical solidarity. Ten years of disputes among the ministers had made impossible any aggressive doctrinal orthodoxy in the Bay colony. In lieu of creeds it was the individual congregation which, in the matter of externals, established a minimum orthodoxy in each congregation. Properly speaking the New England Way was a procedural orthodoxy. Procedures conducive to a homogeneous congregation and a united ministry were deemed more important than creeds as an expression of Christian unity in the colony. Significantly, when the churches ratified creeds (as they were to do in 1648 and again in 1680) those creeds were considered only as expressions of unity in the colony and a solidarity with other Reformed churches in England.[64] How congenial this state of affairs was to ministers in an age which revered uniformity is open to question. One thing is certain, however. Politics within the ministerial community had made it inevitable.

IV

"The Reverend Elders:" The Ambiguity of the Organized Ministry in Massachusetts Bay, 1640--1648

The disputes among the ministers and their inability to formulate a working definition of faith should not be confused with an accurate measure of the Bay clergy's overall influence. Nor should clerical distaste for creeds and the clergy's Amesian commitment to a mild and seemingly ineffective synodical authority be considered entirely representative of the ministers' attitude towards their own collective authority. The ministers did succeed in defining a visible church as an approximation of a congregation of visible saints, although they may have disagreed concerning the desirable degree of perfection within that church. Moreover, clerical authority exerted during and after the Antinomian controversy was considerably more aggressive than the ministers themselves would have liked to admit. A considerable hiatus between practice and theory in matters of clerical authority was making an expanding clerical presence the ambiguous instrument of consociation which Robert Keayne described in his will. Perhaps it could not be otherwise, for the clergy in minimizing dogmatic uniformity made all the more vital a procedural orthodoxy; in a colony where there could be differences of opinion it was even more necessary that a united clergy exert its unifying influence. But the nature and limits of that influence were understood neither by minister nor layman. As a result a new dispute broke out among the clergy, and between the clergy and the laymen in the churches, over the nature of consociated authority and the proper balance which should be struck between that authority and congregational liberties. Eventually carried for resolution to the Cambridge Synod, the synodical description of consociated authority stands as one of the supreme ironies of New England Congregationalism.

The clergy's status conventus during and after the Antinomian controversy was amorphous; collective clerical authority knew no exact boundaries. The ministers' authoritative presence fed upon its own successes, expanding during the 1630's in response to events and extending its influence as if searching for its own omnipotence. It was the ministers who affected accord in their ranks during the controversy and it was they who proceeded to convene themselves, together with a few prominent laymen, as a synod. Despite lay participation the Synod of 1637 was really no more than a gathering of churched and unchurched ministers, a fact which explains the reference to it during the period as "the assembly" or "the assembly of ministers."[1] The clergymen, with the assent of the magistrates, determined to prosecute Anne Hutchinson "in a church way", drew up charges in one of their meetings and prosecuted their own case in the Boston church.[2] By standards subsequently established (in the Cambridge Synod) this clerical activity was irregular on several counts. If synods were to be composed of ministers and delegates elected by the separate churches and if each church had the exclusive right to prosecute those it excommunicated, the ministers violated two cardinal principles of Congregationalism. A number of ministers as yet unchurched were a vital part of the Synod of 1637 while important clergymen from other congregations joined with Cotton and Wilson in pressing their charges against Mrs. Hutchinson in the Boston church.[3]

Such "irregularities" could only be considered illegal in retrospect for but the barest outlines of the New England Way had been established by 1637. But judging by the free hand which the clergy allowed themselves in the earlier "Modell," their activities during and after the synod are hardly surprising, although their aggressive prosecution of sister Anne during her trial in the Boston church seems to have gone beyond even the limits of clerical authority as then set down. The magistrates, for their part, believed that the collective clergy was an organization which had the authority to influence a congregation's internal affairs. They asked, for example, that the ministers seriously consider altering the length and frequency of church meetings. The Court made the mistake, however, of thinking the ministers could be used as reverend agents of the government. When the ministers balked, fearing not only for the churches' freedom from magisterial interference but for their own integrity as independent spokesmen for the churches, the magistrates backed down, insisting that "the elders had great power in the people's hearts, which was needful to be upheld, lest the people should break their bonds through abuse of liberty ... which the wisdom and care of the elders did still prevail against."[4]

Independent of the Court and yet revered by the magistrates, concerned for their reputation in the congregations yet possessing power in the people's hearts, the ministers enjoyed a unique authority which is difficult to characterize in theoretical terms. The totality of clerical influence could not be reconciled with the voluntaristic ideals of Ames, yet the ministerial literature during this period did tend to exploit Ames' prestige and use his ideas concerning classes and synods. This was done both out of a commitment to an ethic of voluntaryism embraced by many of the ministers and for purposes of differentiating church procedures in New England from those advocated by English Presbyterians. Mather, for example, cast the ministers' collective authority in an oversimplified Amesian mold. He was immediately attacked in print by English Presbyterians. The Bay clergy replied in kind, and in the ensuing pamphlet controversy, the New England Way and Bay clerical authority was defined quite naturally in non-Presbyterian terms suitable for use in debate.

The Presbyterians were ably represented by Thomas Paget, the erstwhile member of the Dutch Reformed Classis and a primary antagonist of the defunct English Classis. In replying to Mather's Answer of the Elders Paget insisted on the question of classical authority that irreconcilable differences in a congregation should be adjudicated by the collective eldership sitting in a classis. The power of the keys was not to lie in the hands of the local congregation if church members could not administer that authority peaceably or effectively, he wrote. "In the Classical union and consociation of neighbour Churches" insisted Paget, "no one Church hath any prerogative or power above another, nor any one Minister or Elder greater authority then another: But their questions are determined by most voyces; and they are all mutuall and equally subject unto one another in the Lord." Judging by the writings of his New England adversaries, Paget noted, the New England Way was a deviation from the practices of Reformed churches and perversion of classical authority because it limited and confined "all Ecclesiasticall jurisdiction within the bounds of a particular Congregation." New Englanders acknowledged "Synods to be lawfull, expedient and necessary," continued Paget, "yet this they hold to be onely in regard of counsell and advise, for provocation, direction and countenance: but doe not acknowledge them to have any authority to give sentence for the decision of causes....They maintaine that every particular Congregation is independent, not standing under any other Ecclesiasticall authority out of themselves." For support and corroboration Paget cited scripture for a model church polity commensurate with his views. Old Testament examples of eldership, he suggested, indicated that "the people of God in particular Congregations were taught to bring their hard and difficult controversies as well Ecclesiasticall as Civill unto a superior Judicatory, unto the Preists and Levites, or unto the Judge in those dayes." In addition, he noted, there were numerous examples in the Acts of the Apostles to warrant the judicial function of classes and synods.[5]

Presbyterianism as described by Paget, Samuel Rutherford and Charles Herle (to give their due to three active pamphleteers) was seen as a federation of congregations which assumed a degree of centralized authority and stressed oneness -- the unity of congregations organized as a national church.[6] The New England clergy, on the other hand, preferred to think of consociation as a confederation of churches designed for the adjudication of problems by mutual help and guidance. Their controlling assumption was the belief that ecclesiastical authority resided in the individual congregation and that the church, properly considered, was a gathering of visible believers. Whereas Presbyterians were interested in reforming a national church without breaking it assunder, the Bay divines wished to strengthen a colony of congregations wherein the congregation had been acknowledged as the fundamental expression of Christian unity to be found in a church of visible saints. John Davenport's answer to Paget defined the nature of the particular church as a "Spiritual Building" constructed upon Jesus Christ "As Preached by the Ministry of the Gospel.... As believed on with a Faith made visible by public confession."[7] Richard Mather sought to define the confederation of churches from much the same point of view. A synod can have no original or coercive power, he argued in answer to Charles Herle, because it cannot be shown that a synod is a church, that is an organization of the faithful with an inherent power of jurisdiction.[8]

By Mather's standards, the clergy reached out to mark Anne Hutchinson for excommunication in spite of rather than because of their attitude toward extracongregational authority. If the Bay clergy distrusted the coercive authority of Scottish classes and English bishops, they did not distrust their own sense of authority. They differed from the Presbyterians, however, because they faced a different set of problems. Thus the themes of accomodation and confederation, persuasion and reconciliation were major themes in their literature. The elders had to define and then defend a viable church system which could contain congregations holding diverse opinions. Moreover they had to cope with a situation wherein they could participate in the clarification of doctrine and yet give sufficient recognition to covenanted fellowships which spurned creedal conformity. How this was to be done seemed simple enough when contrasted to Presbyterianism, but when they debated among themselves the elders found no simple solution to the problems of consociated authority.

The basic question which the clergy faced internally was the legitimacy of that complex authority inherent in their association. While one in condemning the coercive power of presbyteries, the ministers were more candid among themselves, admitting differences of opinion concerning the authority of classes. Meeting sometime in late 1640 or 1641, the clergy addressed themselves to the resolution: "viz., that the assembly of elders have power over particular churches." The consensus was expressed by John Phillips of Dedham. "I conceive with you all that [every] church have ...

government within itself." But how that government related to ministerial assemblies was another question. John Eliot was sufficiently enamored with clerical authority to insist that the collective eldership could excommunicate and ordain in the individual church. This power, he argued, was derived by an act of federation which Eliot considered to be implied in the churches' consociational activities. As church members joined together and thus enjoyed ecclesiastical power, so, he argued, there was an analogous situation whereby a joining of churches in communion created an original power of jurisdiction. Eliot drew out the acts of consociation to what was for him a logical conclusion. Arguing for a federated power which was inherent in an act of consociation (as had Paget), he applied what might be called the theory of implied covenants to yet one more facet of religious life in the colony. Peter Bulkley of Concord spoke for the more cautious ministers. Like Mather's refutation of Rutherford, Bulkley's argument was based upon the proposition that the elders had no original jurisdiction because all power resided in independent congregations.[9] Perhaps it was because he was from one of the more isolated communities that he placed so great an emphasis upon the integrity of the individual congregation. He did not wish, in any sense, to protect the individual congregation by isolating it from a larger community of interests. But he realized that integration into the community of churches must come voluntarily and depend upon a matured responsibility in the congregation itself. Consociation, as he put it in a letter to a fellow conferee, was "of singular use and necessary ... to communicate light [to the congregation] , rather than to authorize power. Particular churches may want much light, yet I thinke the power of execution must come from within."[10] For Bulkley as for most of the other ministers, the primary expression of organized religion was to be found in the church life of the individual congregation. But if he stressed the confederated nature of the Bay churches, he was not unwilling to think of the whole as did the Presbyterians or the English Amesians such as Ash and Rathband: "I doubt not but that the name of a church may be extended further then to a single congregation, many such congregations assisting themselves by combination."[11]

When the Bay ministers could speak candidly they were unwilling to emphasize as absolute those differences between Presbyterianism and their form of church discipline which they stressed for purposes of debate. The Presbyterian polity was not seen as necessarily inimical to the individual congregation, although the elders distrusted the power that went with the polity. John Phillips admitted that he would live under a Presbyterian jurisdiction and keep his differences to himself rather than choose non-affiliation, for otherwise "they will refuse communion and then I suffer."[12] And if Phillips ratified the fraternalism of congregations to be found in the Presbyterian polity, the ministers were generally agreen on another feature of Presbyterianism: while uncertain of the extent of collective clerical authority they nevertheless expressed a desire to make of "the elders" an agency which could function as the authoritative voice on questions of dogma. During the conference Richard Mather spoke at greatest length on the nature of clerical power, casting the majority opinion in terms of a confederated authority. The elders gatherings -- "classes" Mather called them -- had no original jurisdiction, for the ministers had no direct grant of power from any source outside of the churches. Rather, their authority was derived by the consent of the churches. This was what might be called a natural authority, inherent in the superior wisdom of an educated elite who were primarily concerned with asserting their right to "direct and advise", or as John Allin, a fellow conferee put it, to "consult and admonish."[13]

Judging by opinions expressed in the conference it is evident that the elders were seeking to identify their unique position within the general Reformed tradition in somewhat more detail than was undertaken in the "Modell." They differed from their English colleagues in one important particular, a difference by which they identified their uniqueness. The Bay elders had a profound if somewhat naive belief in the power of persuasion, consensus and accomodation, in the average individual's willingness to recognize the elders' superior virtues and wisdom, and in the ability of congregations to combine in a mature consociation of churches intended to serve the general good.

It is evident that the ministers approached the definition of their authority with uncertain minds. Conflicting loyalties which made them responsible at once to the particular congregation and to the community of churches were frequently difficult to reconcile. One need not have been a Presbyterian to experience a commitment to the community of churches nor was there any necessary correlation between loyalty to the rigid hierarchical authority of Presbyterian classes and an appreciation for the authority of "the elders in assembly." An example from Thomas Shepard's address "To the Ministers of Assembly" on the nature of eldership is a revealing case in point.[14] While Shepard was wary of a classis which was a distinct entity, his nameless opponent (Eliot perhaps?) had argued that the ministers were elders "to all the people" when taken in their collective sense and not just elders of individual congregations. The assembly of elders and apostles described in Acts, Shepard's antagonist had asserted, was a distinct organization with a clear-cut role to play as a "presbytery over a presbytery." Quite obviously this elder was wrestling with those conflicting roles he had to play as a minister to a congregation and as a member of a ministerial group with pretensions to authority. In the mind of Shepard's antagonist, the conflicting roles could have been reconciled by creating a special category of eldership (such as a hierarchy of local presbyteries) to account for the dual roles.

Here was a problem more basic than a commitment to this or that system of ecclesiastical polity, for it impinged upon a viable definition of church polity by which a minister could sort out his responsibilities. The conflict of roles should not be underestimated. It created tension at crisis points in the individual minister's career when he was faced with the choice of siding with his congregation or with his ministerial colleagues. At times the conflict was mitigated by the conscious efforts of the minister and the ministerial group to accomodate their differences. But if a latitude of opinion was recognized within the ministerial community, there was also the recognized obligation to preserve clerical solidarity.

The case of John Cotton and his modus vivendi with the clergy during and after the Antinomian controversy is indicative of that clerical cohesion which underwrote clerical authority in the colony. If Cotton was accomodated, he was nevertheless made to feel guilty for his deviations. He could complain to Peter Bulkley of the conspicuous lack of brotherly love towards him and lament to Samuel Stone "that God was willing to bring me low in the Eyes of the Brethren, I doe acknowledge his Righteous Hand therein." Permanent controversy was so painful to him that he prefered a self-imposed exile to the alternative of contending with his colleagues. Exile was dictated by "an inward loathness to be troublesome unto godly minds, and a fear of the unprofitableness of my ministry."[15] And though his differences of opinion were maintained without exile, they created distrust which poisoned personal relationships for a time. Aggressive Hugh Peter would have tried Cotton together with Mrs. Hutchinson, while Shepard could disgustedly confide to his "Autobiography" that "Mr. Cotton: repents not: but is hid only."[16] Cotton's deviations were an open secret. Edmund Brown, Sudbury's pastor, observed in 1639 that "only Mr. Cotton affirmeth that primitive evidence is from the immediate witness of the Spirit; now other Elders would have the Lord left free which way to worke."[17] Cotton staunchly defended his independency, insisting to one critic and supporter of the Antinomians that "I must ever be forced to speak ... what my soule groaneth under as my heavyest Burden." "If you thinke I condescende to the opposite part, because I beare Witnesse against a more opposite Part ... I wish you a better Spirit of Discerning."[18] Yet Cotton went so far as to admit that he had been a "stalking horse" for the Antinomians and that he was saved from inadvertently encouraging heresy because of a vigilant clergy. Thus despite personal alienations and unreconciled doctrinal differences, Cotton's contriteness brought him back to the fold. And during Mrs. Hutchinson's trial he publicly thanked "in my owne Name and in the Name of owr Church, theas owr Brethren, the Elders of other Churches, for thear Care and faythfullnes in waching over owr Churches, and for bringing to Light what owr selves have not bine soe ready to see in any of owr Members, and to take soe much paynes, to seeke to reduce any of owrs from going astray: and I shall desier that this faythfull and wachfull Care of thears towards [us] may still be continued."[19]

While maintaining his unique theological identity the Boston minister did submit to a certain amount of censure by his colleagues. In its effect clerical admonition could serve as an effective alternative to outright discipline as advocated by English Presbyterians and did, therefore, lend considerable cohesion to the ministerial community above and beyond the self-fulfilling myth of clerical solidarity. Such was the interpretation which Robert Baillie, the Scottish Presbyterian and vehement foe of the New England Way put upon the clergy's admonition. Baille assumed that Cotton had suffered official censure at the hands of his brethren which "much humbled his Spirit, and opened his eare to instruction, and I trust will not leave working, till it have brought him yet nearer to his Brethren." Though Cotton was unwilling to admit that the ministers' efforts to bring him around was anything more than a "consultatory conference in a Synod, which did not assume to themselves any power of Church-censures", he would still acknowledge that "It is true, my spirit had much cause to be humbled." Cotton chaffed under the enormity of the clergy's procedures, so he informed Baillie, believing that the clergy's method of healing differences "did seeme to me to be transported with more jealousies, and heates, and paroxysimes of spirit, then would well stand with brotherly love, or the rule of the Gospel." But, in retrospect, he was able to put a charitable construction on the affair and, assuming his humiliation for the sake of making a point, suggested that "if my fall were so dangerous ... the greater Grace and witnesse from heaven was upon his Churches in this way, who by the blessing of God were instruments of recovering me out of this fall."[20]

If Cotton was trying to make light of a humiliating experience, his remarks were also an excellent example of the resolution of conflicting roles upon which clerical solidarity depended. Less fortunate because more obstinate than Cotton, John Wheelwright was banished from the colony and was permitted to return only upon recognizing the primacy of clerical concord and prestige which he did by apologizing for having "reflected dishonour upon ... the reverend elders."[21] Williams, of course, had suffered a similar fate for breaking ranks with his brethren. "Were my soule in your soules stead" Cotton wrote Williams shortly after the latter's banishment, "I should thinke it a worke of Mercy of God to banish me ... when I could not injoy the holy fellowship with any church of God." Williams, Cotton continued, had maliciously neglected "the testimony, and judgement of so many elders and Brethren of other Churches."[22] Cotton, of course, had done that very thing barely one year after Williams' forced departure. But he was able to heed his own advice where Williams was not.

Cotton's advice was given in answer to Williams' query "Whether Persecution for Cause of Conscience, be not against the Doctrine of Jesus Christ the king of kings?" Anticipating the clergy's solutions to their differences during the Antinomian controversy several years later, Cotton had suggested that his answer must hinge upon three conditions: in a society men may differ over nonfundamentals, that is opinions which are "circumstantiall, or less principall"; these differences are to be "held forth in a meeke and peaceable way, though the things be erroneous and unlawfull."[23] Cotton's remarks were meant to counsel Williams in the ways of accomodation. As the views of one who practiced accomodation and tried to reconcile the contractictory roles a Bay clergyman was expected to play, they serve as a useful example of the social cement in the ministerial community. But one wonders whether clerical cohesion came about solely by means of accomodation, for Cotton's remarks suggest that he himself may have wisely sought accord out of fear of persecution and of magisterial coercion. Cotton's remarks, then, are also a useful point of departure for a larger question -- dissent from orthodoxy -- and the part played by coercion in the New England Way.

The quickest perusal of Cotton's remarks will reveal a glaring inconsistency of thought, an inconsistency which lies at the very heart of the elders' attitude towards authority and therefore an inconsistency which suggests the nature of the elders' ambiguous position as an instrument of consociation. As Congregationalists Cotton and his colleagues eschewed power and coercion, preferring the alternatives of voluntaryism, dialogue and persuasion. But as typical children of their age the elders believed that pernicious opinion could be controlled and its adherents persecuted and silenced.

Cotton was typical of his age when arguing against toleration. He, like others among the Bay leaders, realized that consensus rather than dissent was the proper end of all dialogue in society. This view presupposed, of course, that there was a viable mode available for discussing matters where consensus was desired. Speaking of the numerous church conferences in the colony, Cotton outlined the method by which accord was supposedly achieved.

Differences were submitted to disputation until matters were cleared up. This was a process in continual operation, breaking down differences as a prelude to consensus. Thus, some latitude of opinion was to be expected on questions which would "admit further discussion; yea, and difference of apprehension, without disunion of affection, or disturbance of the Churches peace; yet for satisfaction of God's people the mean while, in such things each man is left to his Christian liberty."[24]

In addition to the toleration of nonfundamentals then, dissent was permissible when opinion on a fundamental issue was in a state of flux, when divergent views represented the various sides of an issue under debate. On occasion accomodation of nonfundamentals really meant the toleration of contradictory viewpoints on a given subject, as was the case with the clergy's differing viewpoints on the covenant of Grace. But this was not only unusual; it was an undesirable state of affairs. Far more common was the nontoleration of dissenters from the fundamental ideals of the culture. Despite his bitter differences with the Bay leaders even Roger Williams shared the prejudices of his age. Though Williams would not persecute a religious conscience, he agreed with the ministers and magistrates in advocating the suppression of dissenters for "scandal against the civil magistrate."[25]

At some point almost all seventeenth century men would advocate the suppression of dissent, for "truth" was considered the handmaid of social stability. Typical of his generation was the "simple Cobbler of Aggawam", the reverend Nathaniel Ward of Ipswich, who was an eloquent advocate of social cohesion and accomodation in New England. "Not to tolerate things merely indifferent to weak consciences, argues a conscience too strong: pressed uniformity in these, causes much disunity." "That state is wise," he cautioned "that will improve all paines and patience rather to compose, then tolerate differences in Religion.... They which divide in Religion, divide in God; they who divide in him, divide beyond Genus Generalissimum where there is no reconciliation, without atonement; that is, without uniting in him, who is One, and in his Truth, which is also one." Such was his rationale for Christian unity. "Wise are those men," he counseled the obstinate, "who will be perswaded rather to live within the pale of Truth where they may bee quiet, than in the purlieus, where they are sure to be hunted ever and anon." "And prudent are those Christians," the Cobbler approvingly observed, "that will rather give what may be given, then hazard all by yeelding nothing."[26] Though Ward would accomodate differences, he would demand fidelity to prevailing religious ideals, to truth as he saw it, because he considered dissent in religious matters too protracted to be responsible.

A government should have a right to dictate values for the sake of unity, the Ipswich preacher insisted, and it "must have power to make and keep people honest." While privately held opinions might be tolerated, men could be held accountable for their public honesty, that is to say, for seditious actions resulting either from a public display of seditious ideas or for an obnoxious display of differences even on nonfundamentals. Williams was banished for his public display of differences in broaching "dyvers newe and dangerous opinions" against "the authoritie of magistrates" while Wheelwright, whose opinions during the Antinomian controversy were no more heretical than those of Cotton, was banished when found "guilty of contempt and sedition."[28] Such restrictions on the public display of a private conscience led John Clarke, an astute critic of the New England Way, to question how any truth could be maintained when a man could not act out the dictates of his conscience.[29]

The answer to Clarke's question was to be found in a prevailing opinion of the period which was thoroughly inbedded in the English common law. The common law dealing with dissent was predicated upon the assumption that man, if in possession of his faculties, could be punished for malicious acts proceeding from a malicious will. Conscience could not be protected if, when translated into action, it was considered a willful attempt at sedition. By contrast, English libertarian views in support of toleration were based upon the proposition that man was not altogether responsible for holding "right" or "wrong" opinions. Leonard Levy has suggested that until the appearance of John Locke in the latter part of the century only William Walwyn advocated the radical opinion that "Because of what judgement soever a man is, he cannot chuse but be of that judgement." Locke was to suggest that mens' minds operated irrationally in the sense that propositions which were "as clear as daylight" to some men do not seem so to others. Men's differences of opinion arose, Lock suggested, because of different "associations of ideas" created by chance and custom, associations which formed settled "habits of thinking and understanding."[30]

The Bay leaders -- magistrates and ministers -- took no such Lockean view of man. Though the elders were realistic enough to accept accomodation on nonfundamentals and to realize that some values were always in a state of development, they were nevertheless authoritarian idealists. They believed that ideological unity could and should be achieved, that fundamentals could be ascertained so far as was possible and a deviating conscience punished for its deviations. The elders, like the Bay society at large, believed in heeding the fundamentals which were considered instrumental to social cohesion. The individual was expendable and could be sacrificed to the interests of the group. Cotton favored the democratic tyranny of a majority of informed minds. In effect his idealism was shot through with a relativism that favored the sort of majority opinions which brought peace and tranquility to a society, though neither he nor his colleagues in their pursuit of absolute truth recognized as much. Their relativism was a major blind-spot, an aberration of the clerical mind because it was not accompanied by an appreciation for the transient nature of ideas, for the obligation to one's conscience which such a relativism bred, or for the tolerance needed for objectively examining an opponent's propositions. In contrast to Locke the elders supported a view which Rousseau was to popularize a century and a half later when he insisted that the "social compact" which gave form to the "general will" was to be preserved by forcing dissenters to heed the general will, speciously reasoning that the will of the majority was a fair approximation of the individual's will if he would only concede as much. Like Rousseau, Cotton and his colleagues recognized that men think in groups and believed that by striving for accord they could create guide lines by which to direct the day to day activities of social beings. If Rousseau would force dissenters to heed the general will, and if the common law would punish a man when opinion was translated into action, Cotton would persecute Williams for his "erroneous and blinde Conscience."[31]

In comparison to this authoritarian position, the elders' assertion that "unity and verity" could be achieved by consensus among the churches was a novel idea for seventeenth century men. It is little wonder that English Presbyterians were aghast. More significant, however, are the implications of this dual view of authority for the New England Way. Unless we assume that these authoritarian and democratic views of consensus were reconciled in the minds and institutions of the colony, we must accept the fact that considerable tension, confusion and ambiguity was inherent in any organization supported by men with this schizophrenic view of consensus and authority.

Understandably the elders' attitude towards their collective authority was self-deceiving, for by comparison to Presbyterianism the clergy considered themselves congregationalists who were free of any authoritarian taint. Collective clerical authority, theoretically considered, was thought derivative, contingent upon and exercised subsequent to a congregation's misbehavior. Clerical authority in New England, so the clergy tended to argue, was a secondary source of ecclesiastical power, the effect of, rather than the cause of, consociational solidarity, an authority with no original jurisdiction which was remedial rather than preventative in nature. In their self-deception the elders passed off their aggressive use of authority as benign and passive. The elders had developed the concept of a voluntary classis to distinguish themselves from the image of a coercive classis maintained by their Presbyterian adversaries. As is so often the case, the controversialist's argument -- a tactical rebuttal to an adversary's point of view -- is forced upon him by the nature of debate. Such was the case with the Bay elders.

Though ministerial theories created a tidy system of logical propositions concerning clerical authority, such propositions were not entirely descriptive of the system which they meant to justify. If the ministers argued for a benign clerical presence considered to be a result of confederation, they were emphasizing but one aspect of an authority which could be aggressively administered by those who considered "unity and verity" as supreme social virtues. Moreover, theory followed function. While the clergy began aggrandizing influence and power as early as 1633, they did not have a well-developed rationale for their authority until the late 1630's or early 1640's. Thus their theories were not altogether descriptive when they tried to codify an authority which had not originally been organized or limited by theoretical considerations. Finally, and perhaps most important, the clergy did not come to terms with their use of coercion in a congregational system. While advocating a democratic consensus they were prepared and quite able to impose their will because they had an instrument of coercion within their grasp through their close association with the magistracy.

Even the most conscientious of ministers could not reconcile functions and authority. John Cotton, a primary architect of the New England Way, found it necessary to write two treatises on the subject which were difficult to reconcile at points. His _The Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven_, a largely theoretical treatise written in 1644, was meant to distinguish the New England Way from English Presbyterianism. "The first subject of all church power" was the "particular Congregation ... walking with a right foot in the truth and peace of the Gospel." Though congregational integrity was unassailable so long as the church walked uprightly, "when it is leavened with error and variance" the doctrinal authority of classes and synods pre-empts congregational autonomy. Among the corollaries to be drawn from this proposition, Cotton observed that if the apostles saw fit

> to consult and confer together about the work of their ministry ... then surely Churches, and Elders of Churches had need to communicate their courses and proceedings in such cases one with another to procure the freerer passage to the same. And if the Apostles giving right hand of fellowship one to

> another, did mutually strengthen their hands in the work of the ministry: then the Elders of Churches, giving right hand of fellowship to one another in their ordination, or upon any fit occasion, cannot but much encourage and strengthen the hearts and hands of one another in the Lords work.[32]

In his The Way of the Churches, published in 1645, however, Cotton sought to describe collective clerical discipline as it actually functioned in the colony. In the process he gave a hint that the elders' authority was more than derivative, passive and dependent upon the consent of the governed. For example, in order to bring the authority of consociation into play, it was necessary that someone initiate the process. "In which case" Cotton observed,

> the Elders of the Churches, desirious to maintain verity, and unity of judgement in matters of doctrine, and integrity of life throughout all the Churches do both acquaint our Magistrates being nursing fathers to the Church, with the necessary occasions and ends of a generall and solemn assembly, and so solicit the Churches to send some fit persons to a synod.[33]

Ambiguities to be found in a comparison of these two documents forced Cotton to chase inconsistencies across the Atlantic with a letter insisting that the Way and the Keyes were not contradictory, although "you may have some occasion so to conceive from some differences of expression in Logicall Terms."[34] Notably, The Way, despite its later publication date, had been written several years earlier when Cotton was uncertain about church discipline. Such were the problems of interpreting the New England Way that a very busy divine found it necessary to address himself to the same subject at least twice.[35]

If a dedicated minister could view polity in several different ways it is apparent that the organization of the collective clergy was in a state of flux. The remarks of lawyer Thomas Lechford who migrated to New England as a firm opponent of episcopal authority make interesting reading in this respect. By 1640 Lechford had come to see the wisdom of bishops, especially in their superintending capacity. Lechford, a close observer of "the propogation of the truth, and government of the Church [in Massachusetts Bay] by experimentall footsteps", argued for a more aggressive ecclesiastical authority than the "classical pretendments" of the Bay clergy. Yet he readily admitted that the ministers were becoming more willing to exert a superintending authority over scattered congregations. "Some of the learnedst, and godliest in the Bay, begin to understand governments; that it is necessary, when Ministers or People fall out, to send other Ministers, or they voluntarily to goe among them, to seek by all good wayes and meanes to appease them." The clergy were learning to play a more aggressive, superintending role in church affairs, Lechford observed, and therefore were developing an organization commensurate with their aspirations. "Of late" he attested, "divers of the Ministerie have had set meetings to order Church matters; whereby it is conceived they bend towards Presbyterian rule."[36] Robert Baillie thought he knew the reason behind this creeping Presbyterianism. "The brethren of New England incline more to synods and Presbyteries, driven therto by the manifold late heresies, schisms and factions broke out among them."[37]

Advocate Lechford, for all of his courtroom pugnacity, was one of the clergy's most astute critics. Drawing upon his own reading of the New Testament, the primary source of information on the ancient church, Lechford harassed the elders with embarrassing questions which were intended to point out the shortcomings in the New England Way. Among Lechford's concerns was his desire to see provisions made for what might be called a general clergy as opposed to a local ministry. Though these distinctions followed no hard and fast rules in the ancient church, the scattered enclaves of Christians received spiritual guidance from the apostles of whom Paul was the most important.[38] The general difference between the Bay clergy and the Reformed churches on this point was that the latter assumed that the clergy, classically organized, should exert the same authority and influence as did the apostles, while the Bay ministers insisted that there was no general clergy and thus no generalized authority. The functions of the apostles were to be carried out through the cooperation of local ministers and the extended right hand of fellowship. Lechford was at his best when he wondered how the Indians could be Christianized if a church in New England was created at a church gathering and not by the efforts of ministers acting as apostles and evangelists as of old. He demanded, in effect, that the Bay churches recognize in the work of their ministers among the Indians a precedent for establishing a general clergy, a recognition which would have led the clergy to see the churches as one organic church rather than as a group of churches and themselves as a general rather than a local clergy.[39] Through Lechford's eyes it is possible to see the clergy functioning as a general ministry and to recognize that the elders were self-deceived if they thought that a Congregational system could exist without making provisions for executing the functions of a general clergy.

What Lechford saw as the growth of Presbyterianism among the elders, English critics claimed to be an example of gross hypocrisy among the congregational ministers. William Rathband exposed the incongruous clerical authority which contributed to this so-called hypocrisy when he observed that the elders

> hold the Ministers are but the Churches servants ... though they meet together to consult of matters for the good of the Churches, or to prepare matters for the Churches hearing ... Mr. [Hugh] P [eters] tels us that the ministers have ther agreed amongst themselves that none of them shall preach any doctrine that is not commonly received amongst them, till he have first communicated it with the rest of the Ministers: and what's this but in effect a compound Presbyterie ruling without peoples votes, and also a Canon made by the common consent and imposed: both contrary to their own principles."[40]

The abusive Baillie, always one to label an opinion different from his own as hypocrisy and error, recognized in the Bay clergy's authority a power which exceeded even that of the Reformed clergy. "They give to their Ministers a power to sit in Civill Courts, and to voyce in the Election of the Magistrates, and to draw from Scripture Civill Lawes for the government of the state."[41]

The portrait of clerical authority drawn by Lechford and the Presbyterians differed from the self-portrait of the Bay ministers. Where the elders emphasized reconciliation, disgruntled objects of clerical authority like Lechford (he was censured for his impudent observations) recognized a source of coercion within the clergy's grasp which made them far more powerful than a classis which ostensibly ruled by persuasion. Admonition by the clergy, Lechford observed, was done "by way of love and friendly advise." But the counseled were forced to heed the clergy's advice because "the Magistrate [was] ready to assist, and in a manner ready, according to duty, to enforce peace and obedience."[42]

The range of collective ministerial authority exercised in ministerial meetings simply could not be contained within the severe theoretical confines of a Congregational classis. If the ministers stressed their ability to persuade while abjuring coercive authority, they still had available a source of coercion which made admonition an effective means of maintaining orthodoxy. If Cotton and his colleagues could luxuriate in the myth of non-coercion they could also advocate the repression of those who deviated from what the clergy tried to convince them was "truth." As Cotton put it in his letter to Williams: "In fundamentall and principall points of Doctrine and Worship, the word of God in such things is so cleare" that one "cannot but be convinced in Conscience of the dangerous Error of his way, after once or twice Admonition wisely and faithfully dispensed. And then if an one persist, it is not out of Conscience, but against his Conscience ... So that if such a man, after such Admonition shall still persist ... He is not persecuted for Cause of Conscience, but for sinning against his owne Conscience."[43]

The clergy's status conventus about which Williams had fretted was indeed honeycombed with contradictions. Eschewing coercion as an operable mode of ecclesiastical authority, the elders exercised a persuasive admonition which relied on the brute power of the magistracy as its trump card. Although they rejected the classical power of the Presbytery even to the extent of arguing among themselves concerning the power of the elders in assembly, the clergy exercised an effective power which left even the more authority-oriented Presbyterians aghast. The key to this extensive power is to be found in the nature of the ministerial meeting.

The elders met on at least one hundred and sixty separate occasions over a forty-year period (1630-1672). Like the iceberg's tip, these meetings recorded in a variety of sources, are but a portion of the total collective life hidden from view by fragmentary evidence.[44] Monthly, quarterly and yearly meetings of all the ministers was proposed as a model of clerical organization, but partial attendance at regular meetings was probably the rule. Boston was the natural place to meet and prior to gathering in the Town House the clergy met at the home of pastor John Wilson.[45] In either place the ministers were convenient to the General Court. "There are two General Courts" Lechford noted, "one every half year, wherein they made Lawes and Ordinances. The Ministers advise in making of Lawes especially Ecclesiastical, and are present in Courts, and advise some speciall causes criminall, and in framing Fundamental Lawes."[46] The ministers took their public duties seriously. When Ezekiel Rogers had to absent himself from a clerical gathering intended to advise the Court, he sent his apologies to Governor Winthrop, assured the magistrate that he (Rogers) would pray for him, and delivered a blessing appropriate for a Christian magistrate: "I commit you to God, resting yours in him to command."[47] Like Rogers at Rowley, other ministers living at some distance from the immediate Boston environs found it impossible to participate fully in the affairs of the elders. When Thomas Lechford's opinions were presented to the elders for review, the lawyer wrote Hugh Peter at Salem asking "that the assembly of the Elders may be full" when the case was considered, fearing that outlying ministers whom he fancied were in his favor might be absent from the meeting.[48]

The accompanying charts indicate that ministerial meetings followed a calendar which coincided with the general and quarterly sessions of the General Court, although the clergy met at all times of the year regardless of Court sessions by "voluntary agreement at convenient times" (to quote the 1635 "Modell"). The ministers were nonchalant about their organization and somewhat irregular in attendence. But such informality was not synonymous with idleness or indifference on their part. Quite the opposite was true. Being nonbureaucratic, clerical authority was not fettered by a constitution or directed toward well defined but limited goals. Particular ministerial meetings were often in the nature of *ad hoc* committee meetings called by churches, the government, or the clergy themselves, to solve some immediate problem.

COMPILATION: STATISTICAL BREAKDOWN OF MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION AND OTHER CONSOCIATIONAL GATHERINGS

(The following charts are based upon a compilation of two hundred ten instances in which the ministers exerted some sort of collective influence. C = formal consociational gatherings such as councils and church organizations; R = ministerial meetings dealing primarily with religious matters; P = ministerial meetings dealing primarily with political matters.)

Table 1: Monthly Distribution of Gatherings

	C	R	P	Total
January	2	4	8	14
February	1	5	2	8
March	4	5	12	21
April	6	6	2	14
May	5	6	12	23
June	2	5	8	15
July	9	4	6	19
August	2	8	5	15
September	6	2	11	19
October	1	14	9	24
November	7	3	8	18
December	6	10	4	20
Totals	51	72	87	210

Table 2: Distribution of Gatherings By Years

	C	R	P	Totals
1632-1640	19	22	36	77
1641-1650	9	20	35	64
1651-1660	9	7	3	19*
1661-1670	9	21	10	40
1671-1672	5	2	3	10
	51	72	87	210

*The declining number of examples after 1650 does not mark an absolute decline in the number of gathering but is due, rather, to the loss of a valuable source -- John Winthrop's Journal -- which ends in 1648.

Table 3: Relative Attendance of Churches at Seventeen Meetings*

Church	C	R	P	Total	Church	C	R	P	Total
Boston	5	3	5	13	Lynn	1	2		3
Roxbury	4	3	3	10	Newbury	1		1	2
Watertown	5	3	2	10	Weymouth	2			2
Dorchester	4	3	2	9	Sudbury	2			2
Cambridge	3	1	4	8	Medfield	1			1
Charlestown	4	2	1	7	Rowley	1			1
Salem	3	1	3	7	Braintree	1			1
Ipswich	1	1	3	5	Concord			1	1
Dedham	3			3					

* The personnel which composed each of the 210 gatherings was seldom identified. They have been identified by church in seventeen instances with the resulting distribution which may give a fairly good indication of the relative influence of the various churches in the consociated life of the colony.

informality meant flexibility and an authority which could be administered in numberless ways.

While clerical authority in the Bay was dynamic and extemporaneous by nature, definite patterns of administration emerged over a period of time. Quite in keeping with a flexible organization ministerial meetings took on functions which were defined through constant usage rather than by preconception. If compared, for example, to the episcopal structure of the English church, the clergy assumed for itself a part of the deliberative functions to be found in English convocations, the administrative function of the diocesan bishops, and the judicial function of the ecclesiastical courts. This comparison by no means suggests that the clergy's authority was in any way the equivalent of that exercised in the English church. Rather, it is meant to suggest three types of religious influence and authority to which Englishmen were accustomed and which, it can be assumed, they found natural to seventeenth century society. If, in other words, the clergy who had wilfully denied the entire concept of episcopal administration assumed for themselves a degree of administrative authority, it was because, as Englishmen and Christians, they had not forsaken a belief in a homogeneous state church.

Perhaps the clergy's most characteristic function was that exercised in their constant deliberations. They advised the General Court on a variety of problems such as the feasibility of introducing a national covenant into the colony (in 1644), the justice of making war on the Dutch (1653), or the desirability of declaring the colony's allegiance to King Charles II (1664).[49] Because of the ministers' matchless education, a learned clergy was considered to be something like a learned council of wisemen, and they were asked to solve problems fundamental to the well-being of the state or the church as when, for example, they were asked "Whether the magistrates are, by patent and elections of the people, the standing councell of the common wealth in the vacancy of the General Court."[50] But the elders' specialty was determining legislation appropriate to a Christian commonwealth. They were asked to bring their knowledge of scripture to bear on such problems as assessing equitable wage scales, the codification of fundamental laws, or the determination of criminal cases such as "The cause of Thomas Kinge, about his wife being defiled before marriage."[51]

Broadly speaking this entire study is concerned with assessing the deliberative function of the clergy which did so much to mold New England Puritanism. So far as the ministerial meeting was concerned, clerical gatherings on a frequent basis provided the social foundations of familiarity and trust without which there could not have been that ministerial consensus which was necessary for authoritative decisions in and out of synods. When serious differences divided the clergy, synodical decisions became vague and generalized as in the Synod of 1637. The Cambridge Platform, as we shall presently see, was something of a compromise because once again, in the synod of 1648, the clergy had their differences. Yet on other occasions the elders spoke with considerable force on religious matters. Such, for example, was the case when the ministers composed the "Modell of Church and Civill Power." We know also that in such conferences as that with Lenthall ministerial deliberations were an effective means of standardizing opinion among the ministers. We are reminded of the significant decision reached by the ministers attending the organization of Shepard's church when it was decided that candidates for church membership should relate the nature of their religious experiences. On another such occasion, when the Concord church was organized "it was resolved by the ministers" there present "that such as had been ministers in England were lawful ministers by the call of the people there, not withstanding their acceptance of the call of the bishops ... but being come hither, they accounted themselves no ministers, until they were called to another church, and that, upon election, they were ministers before they were solemnly ordained."[52] If, in this meeting, the ministers decided a question which had been variously answered since Skelton and Higginson accepted the call from the Salem church in 1629, other meetings held immediately after the Antinomian controversy paved the way for answers to English queries written on behalf of the clergy by Mather and Davenport. While it was Davenport, for instance, who wrote An Answer of the Elders ... unto Nine Positions Sent Over to Them by their English friends and colleagues, the questions were sent to "the Ministers of the Churches" and they were obliged, therefore, to reply collectively though it was "not an easie thing for all of us often to meet together to consider of these Questions much lesse to resolve upon one just answer."[53] Thus it was the ministers who, after collective deliberations, made those public pronouncements on their new attitude towards the church covenant which further clarified the New England Way at home and abroad.

Like its deliberative functions, the administrative functions of the clergy grew out of numerous obligations assumed by them in response to the day to day needs of the churches. The presbytery within the individual congregation (composed of the ministers and the ruling or lay elders) was the steering committee for the congregation's affairs. In theory it depended upon no outside help and was subject to no outside influence. But a ministerial meeting, composed of a collection of congregational presbyteries (minus the ruling elders on almost all occasions), was in effect the "presbytery over a presbytery" to which Thomas Shepard had objected in theory. As Rathband suggested (and rightly so), the ministers agreed not to preach or apply any doctrine in the congregations upon which they had not previously agreed, although in view of Cotton's differences with the clergy it might be more accurate to suggest that the ministers preached nothing which was not compatible with their collective ideals. Then too, the clergy exercised an important administrative function in initiating the process of consociation. In numerous ways, therefore, the elders were a collectivized body of executive officers from individual churches -- whether or not their collective status was recognized as a distinct organization -- which was able to exert its influence in the local congregation through its presbytery.

A variety of problems were thrown into the elders' laps because the ministerial meeting was the only instrument of consociation in continuous operation. Churches with vacant pulpits and unemployed ministers appealed to the gathered ministers for help. When a destitute church came to the attention of the General Court (as did the Portsmouth or Strawberry Bank church), "it was ordered, that the elders should bee disired to take the case of the inhabitants of Strawberry Banck into their consideration."[54] Occupational concerns, the supervision of the Indian missions, organizing fast days, preparing psalmbooks and catechisms and the decision to prevent itinerant preachers from "prophycying in the churches" were all pressed upon the gathered clergy because they were frequently available for consultation by the Court and the churches. Thus the ministerial meeting was an ad hoc instrument of consociation for handling a large number of intercongregational problems, thereby augmenting the clergy's status and influence.

Much the same condition obtained with the elders' judicial function. Since congregations censured their own members, the ministers were not concerned with ordinary judicial procedures. Yet the elders' availability and the occasionally insoluable congregational problems created a situation in which the ministers could carve a quasi-judicial jurisdiction for themselves. When a congregation was hopelessly divided or a minister was suspected of "heretical opinions," or when a non-church member gave vent to strange notions, the ministers were called upon to settle matters. The church council -- a gathering of neighborhood churches called to referee a dispute in the host church which was more formal than the elders' meeting -- was the accepted consociational instrument of arbitration.[55] However the relationship of the ministers-in-meeting to church councils was like the ministers' relationship to synods. That is, problems were frequently handled by the ministers before (or instead of) coming to the attention of councils. Councils were called on at least 28 different occasions between 1632 and 1672 to handle serious disputes, but the elders arbitrated many minor problems and an occasional major dispute, dispensed advice and disciplined churches and church members on at least 41 different occasions during the same period. In addition they admonished laymen (three times), one of them a non-church member, and ministers (on eleven occasions) at the request of the court.

The exercise of judicial functions in ministerial meetings had several advantages over a council. The clergy's close association with the magistracy and their handling of matters which were referred to them directly from the General Court meant that a ministerial meeting had the immediate backing of magisterial power. Moreover the ministerial meeting could deal with non-church members, and it could reach out for dissidents with a magisterial hand, something a council was neither prepared nor willing to do. It must be remembered that while only a portion of the population belonged to the churches, participated in the ordinances and were subject to church discipline, it was assumed by magistrates and ministers that the entire population was subject to Christian standards of conduct. If the churches disciplined their members, the ministerial meeting could be considered as a non-congregational ecclesiastical court which dealt with the unchurched segment of the population and those clergymen residing in the colony who were unemployed or otherwise not subject to church discipline.

Generally speaking the gathered clergy represented a body of religious wisdom and authority whose presence in the colony was used to signify, by the use of their approval or disapproval, a standard of conduct and opinion. If possible the ministers relied solely on their power of persuasion, for they were primarily a court of reconciliation and admonition. From one point of view, as we have seen, the ministers carried on their affairs as a ministerial association in keeping with the rationale of a community of Congregational churches. But the schizophrenic ethic of authority and consensus embraced by both magistrates and ministers meant that in terms of the gathered clergy's judicial function the art of reconciliation could be used to enforce a maximum conformity and uniformity in the colony when backed by the magistracy. In no case did the ministers impose penalties. They simply determined guilt. As the case of Roger Williams demonstrated, where accomodation failed and because toleration was inconceivable, a fraternity of peers could become a jury of peers. Similarly, Lenthall had the choice of admitting defeat in his conference with the elders when the rest of the clergy supported

Cotton's rebuttal of him, suffering the wrath of a magistracy, or voluntary exile. Choosing the first course he was temporarily integrated into the religious community; several years later, after relapsing into his former opinions, he chose the last.[56]

The ministers-in-meeting were virtuosos at their calling, moving easily from their private concerns to political considerations with a versatility and independence of judgement which makes it impossible to consider them hirelings of the Court. The elders frequently took the initiative when necessary. Though the Court decided in 1636 to confront the Antinomian opinionists and asked the ministers to confer with them, they discovered that the clergy was already "about it in a church way."[57] Because there were no demarcated lines of authority in such cases, the partnership between elders and magistrates was dynamic and on occasion subject to strain. Governor Henry Vane was unhappy that the ministers had assumed the initiative in the 1636 meetings while the ministers, for their part, informed the governor that they were pained he should be so hostile to their prerogatives. It all depended, of course, on whose ox was being gored. Governor Winthrop could complain that the ministers meddled in matters "being affairs of state, which did not belong to their calling," but Samuel Maverick, a factious presbyterian in the colony who was vehemently attacked in the colony's pulpits, was handsomely fined by the governor when he made the same complaint, suggesting that the clergy should avoid politics, it being "beyond their calling."[58] Occasionally the clergy were a force to be reckoned with at election time. They influenced elections in 1640 and 1670, in the former case because they feared that Winthrop's office might be considered life-time and hereditary if he were continually elected.[59] The exact relationship between church and state was impossible to define for it was never static. It was an alliance of sentiment and purpose, a coordination of the two power spheres mentioned in the "Modell" which gave eldership its political and secular complexion. The ministers worked hand in hand with the magistracy, recognizing that in doing so they made use of the magistrates as "nursing fathers." On occasion one partner leaned too heavily upon the other and a John Cotton would have to warn that a magistrate who uncritically followed the advice of the clergy made a beast of the church.[60]

If the alliance was an administrative reality giving the elders a functional role in the councils of state, it was also a theoretically desirable state of affairs. John Cotton, Boston's oft quoted minister, reflected the emerging state of affairs during the 1630's and 40's in his letters and sermons. Though Cotton could not speak with a jurist's precision, he recognized that a constitutional settlement in the Bay must attempt a balance of primary interests. He spoke of a homogeneous society, of the congruency of primary interest groups based upon "the nature or strength of the magistracy, ministry and people ... the strength of the magistracy to be their authority; of the people, their liberty; and of the ministry, their purity;" each of these, Cotton concluded, had a negative voice in the affairs of the colony.[61]

If Cotton believed that "Gods institutions (such as government of church and of commonwealth be) may be close and compact, and co-ordinate one to another, and yet not confounded" he was most certainly gratified because the magistracy so frequently resorted to a practice Cotton himself recommended: "the rulers of the people" Cotton preached, "should consult with the ministers of the churches upon occasion of any war to be undertaken, and any other weighty business."[62]

Cotton's sentiments were not unusual for the age nor were the various functions performed by the clergy in church and state. The unique quality to be found in this clerical presence was that charismatic image of collective eldership by which the gathered clergy was identified -- "the Reverend Elders." The term "elders", an occupational title of biblical origin used in the Reformed churches, came to bear a heavy freight of connotations for New Englanders. By definition, elders were wise men, a spiritual and intellectual elite, leaders of a people. Given the New Englanders' penchant for drawing parallels between themselves and ancient Israel a certain sanctity was transferred from Bible to commonwealth by imagery which thrived on the analogy and the play-on-words.[63] Cotton could conclude, for example, that Princes, Nobles and Elders constituted a natural aristocracy of ruling talent. John Higginson, speaking before the General Court, recognized the parallel between Old Testament elders and Bay leaders whom he referred to as the "heads of our tribes." Higginson spoke in his election day sermon of the gathered magistrates and ministers sitting before him as an array of governing talent, the congruency of enlightened opinion which administered colonial institutions.[64] The General Court was acutely aware of the symbolism and careful to display it prominently on such important occasions as when, by Court order, "the elders" magistrates and people were drawn up before Edward Rawson, the colony's secretary, to proclaim Charles II, king of England.[65] John Eliot's Christian Commonwealth carried such symbols to their logical conclusion, proposing a utopian political state based upon scripture, a state in which "The highest Council is to consist of a convenient number of the most holy and able men ... from all the Elders of the people: both in the Commonwealth and in the Churches."[66] Eliot's utopia was one expression of eldership as it worked upon the cultural imagination. Joshua Scottow, the old colonist whose tears flowed for a vanished golden age in New England at century's end, expressed the weathered ideology of a happier generation which saw the Bay colony as another covenanted Israel and the congruency of its leadership as approximating the relationship between Moses and Aaron -- the political and priestly leaders of a wandering tribe -- namely, a "Unity, according to the Integrity of their hearts."[67]

Significantly "the elders" was an image of authority which was more than a private conceit of the clergy or a convenient and popular metaphor with an inherent potential for exploitation in sermon and tract. While the clergy may have internalized a biblical image, making their own actions consonant with Old and

New Testament examples of eldership, their active public life made "the elders" a by-word in the Bay.[68] The term was a symbol of a clerical presence, the essence of a clerical establishment, the institutionalized expression of a functional, clerical authority in the Bay colony. Winthrop's Journal, for example, recorded the burgeoning establishment by adopting the rhetoric of the emerging order. Over a period of four years (1634-1638) "the elders" came to replace "the ministers" as the term usually used to identify the collective life and activities of the ministry. The Journal was not unique, although it was perhaps the best example of a changing vocabulary used in church and government records, private diaries and publications to cope with a new force in colonial life.

In one respect the almost exclusive usage of the term "elders" by 1638 indicates that the colonial churches were being integrated into the Reformed tradition, although in a manner which was indigenous to the New England Way. In the Bay colony the collective clergy was known as "the elders", a collection of church elders meeting for important business. Yet, "the elders" became an important part of the public imagination as a social convention used to identify a group of ministers who collectively exercised political as well as religious functions quite different from and more numerous than those traditionally associated with the minister's occupation. "The elders" was a specialized symbol of clerical presence. To take something to "the elders" for their consideration was to appeal to a specialized authority indigenous to the Bay colony. It was upon this popularized basis that exponents of the New England Way could build up so meaningful an ideology and manipulate biblical metaphors, for references to biblical elders vibrated sympathetically with the colonist's knowledge of scripture and his every day experiences in dealing with the clergy. Thus the assent which a standardized parlance can give to an institution or movement was given to "the elders." Even those in reaction to clerical authority gave credence to that authority by reference to it. To all colonists "the elders" signified the ministers-in-meeting, the authority associated with the collectivized clergy, a specific sphere of influence in church and state. Eldership in the Bay colony was a unique office of colonial leadership, a role to be played in the councils of church and state, membership in a civil authority-structure. Understandably "the elders" were to be revered. In a superstitious age when supernatural forces were believed to affect human lives and society, the clergy had a special claim to importance and devoted meetings to debating the implications of an earthquake or to calculating the date of Antichrist's fall.[69] A special elite, those who ridiculed the elders were subject to the brutal authority of a seventeenth century state. Katherine Finch was whipped for "speaking against the magistrate, against the churches, and against the elders."[70] Harvard students were drilled to "honour as their parents, Magistrates, Elders, tutors and aged persons, by being silent in their presence not gainesaying shewing all those laudable expressions of honour and Reverence in their presence, that are in use as bowing before them standing uncovered or the like."[71]

How can the outer contours of so indefinite an authority be properly defined? It is easier to isolate a charisma than to describe its extent for the charisma is the antithesis of a rational bureaucratic authority with well defined limits.[72] Differences of opinion have arisen on the subject of clerical authority in the Bay precisely because it is difficult to discover a forthright, bureaucratic expression of that authority. Clerical influence was not quite non-bureaucratic, for it was administered with some organizational precision in the classis-like ministerial meeting. Yet if the ministers constituted a classis, it was a classis in an unusual sense of the term (which the elders found hard to explain to English Presbyterians), a classical order which was present more in essence than in fact. Unlike the Scottish Presbytery or the Dutch Classis, the Bay organization was theoretically voluntary and fraternal rather than compulsory and legalistic. Moreover, the manifold activities of the ministers-in-meeting covered a spectrum of issues beyond the scope of the traditional classis. The exercise of ministerial authority was also unusual for it was frequently administered in the extreme. It consisted of a tyranical majority backed by the magistracy at one moment while at other times gentle persuasion was its hallmark. And if the elders could coerce on occasion, their influence was often as perishable as a flower. When trying to arbitrate a bitter land dispute in Sudbury in the 1650's the elders were dismissed with an assertion by one faction that "We shall be, or should be, judged by men of our own chosing." The speaker equivocated, realizing that the ministers might act (as they did) anyway. Yet the elders failed because the dissident party was not a willing party to the reconciliation. Edmund Brown, the Sudbury minister, was told by one parishioner that "Setting aside your office, I regard you no more than another man."[73] The catch-word "theocracy" is an inadequate tool for analyzing so fragile a clerical presence. Yet it suggests something of the mystique of eldership which the clergy possessed and which (as in the Sudbury case), even when they failed to exert their influence, often sustained the clerical image though only through the equivocations of those it angered.

Such was the nature of clerical authority that when carefully used it carried all before it. But when it promoted hostility and anger, it was seldom tolerated. Although a society can accomodate the ambiguities surrounding its fundamental institutions by day to day adjustments, it reacts vigorously when asked to define and ratify those institutions on a constitutional basis. It is one thing to bow before a charisma but quite another thing to ratify and legalize so extensive an authority as that which the elders exercised when it angered those it sought to manipulate. This was the relationship of many individual colonists and churches to the Reverend Elders by the mid 1640's. What they would accept of necessity on an ad hoc basis and what they would accept as a formalized authority when given the choice were two quite different things. Thus, when the Cambridge Synod was called and convened, what had been long settled on a de facto basis was a moot question in terms of a theoretical Congregationalism. Given a chance to examine established ecclesiastical institutions the Synod had the opportunity to compare what had grown by "practice and custom" (as Winthrop suggested) with what ought to exist on a rationalized basis. While the elders themselves were not put on trial, unresolved questions concerning ecclesiastical authority in a community of churches were brought to a focus in the years from 1645 to 1650 when the colony was engaged in calling a synod, setting out a theoretical Congregationalism in the Cambridge Platform, and digesting the implications which the Platform had for the community of churches.

The composition of the Cambridge Platform was to depend upon the fact that the ministers were divided among themselves on answers to a variety of questions. Unlike the divisions over the question of visible faith, these differences were kept within the ministerial community for the most part until the synod. John Norton spoke for a majority of the ministers in his The Answer on the question of consociated authority as he did on the question of visible faith. "Particular churches" he observed "can enter into mutual communion with each other through synods and classes in which, by general consent of the churches, decision and judgment may be made regarding matters common to all -- that is, matters that are common to all particular churches, although they may directly involve only one of them -- such as the calling of pastors, the excommunication of members, and the like, or even such matters as involve all the churches together, directly and equally." He was quick to observe, however, that "Synods and classes rule by wisdom ... and not by authority, not juridicially."[74] Though the churches are not forced to abide by such decisions, they should abide by the collective wisdom expressed by the community of churches.

It is evident what Norton was attempting. He wished to identify a number of common problems found in all congregations and to create the necessary consociational machinery for the collective solution of these problems. Thus the clergy were to be encouraged in the consolidation of their quasi-classical position and in the extension of their influence over the congregations. Norton's position was not a fundamental alteration of the ministers' previous views on the subject but an attempt to ratify and strengthen the consociational machinery which had developed over the past fifteen years. The Answer said substantially what had been said first in the "Modell" and later in the elders' answers to the English queries though in considerably more detail. It would seem, however, that Norton was seeking to extend the range of questions which could be decided by consociational means. And not surprisingly, The Answer reflected the prevailing schizophrenic ethic of authority to be found among the clergy. For all of his concern for a strengthened oonsensus in the churches which was to be derived by voluntary means, Norton insisted that the magistrates were "to confirme by civil sanction doctrine already announced by council or discipline already adopted by the church."[75]

Given the existence of "the elders" and the range of their authority, it is apparent that Norton's "classis" could appeal to the magistracy for civil sanctions needed to enforce their will.

A minority of the clergy, led by Cotton, balked at Norton's formulation, the Boston minister observing in his preface to Norton's work that he and others had reservations about Norton's treatment of "the first subject of church power."[76] In this attitude Cotton was one with Thomas Hooker who observed to his son-in-law, Thomas Shepard, from his deathbed (in 1647) that "I wish there be not a misunderstanding of some things by some [in the Synod], in that the Guiding [power] of Synods be not proposed too much."[77] Though opposed by a majority of their colleagues, Hooker and Cotton (and probably Shepard) were a group to be reckoned with, especially if they had support outside of the ministerial community.

That support, it would appear, was developed in a series of encounters between the elders and some of the churches on the eve of the synod. The Dorchester church, for example, sent an inquiry to a ministerial meeting held in 1645 asking whether the ministers supposed themselves to be a duly constituted synod. To this the ministers replied that they merely met for self-edification. Were they to constitute a synod, church messengers would be called.[78] The confusions surrounding clerical and synodical authority were compounded the following year when the elders, after persuading the magistrates to call a synod, were charged by the Boston, Salem, and Hingham churches with attempting to pack a synod "appointed by the elders, to the intent to make ecclesiastical laws to bind the churches, and to have the sanction of civil authority put upon them."[79] The three churches, like the Dorchester congregation, had reacted to that ambiguous clerical authority which they feared. Such was the confusion surrounding the entire question that they were able to assert their independence and support their remarks only by reference to the Body of Liberties and to the section of that document which stated that "the elders had liberty to assemble without the compliance of the civil authority."[80] The magistrates, meanwhile, saw such popular independency as an assault upon their prerogatives and insisted in their own defense that they had a right to assemble the churches "upon occasion of counsell" for they believed that the elders' right to assemble was only "for a help in case of extremity" when magistrates were indifferent to the plight of the churches.[81] There was, of course, no constitutional relationship nor any schema for resolving these conflicting views. The dissidents harped upon the liberties of the churches, the elders pressed the established prerogatives of eldership and the magistracy sought to exert its influence as nursing fathers.

Thus the stage was set for what was surely one of the most interesting debates to take place in the Cambridge Synod -- the discussion and resolution of consociated authority. The two clerical factions were represented on the committee chosen to draft a platform of church discipline to be used in the synodical deliberations. John Cotton, Richard Mather and Ralph Partridge all submitted proposals (Cotton's proposal is no longer extant though John Wilson, his colleague, submitted a manuscript which is still intact). Of the surviving documents all recommended that the synod in effect ratify the concept of ministerial association.[82] Wilson's draft presented a forthright statement of support for a superintending authority. Synods and councils, he insisted, should be used to determine controversies and establish standards of polity and worship. Moreover, he insisted that they were "To beare witnesse against maladministration in any particular church, and to give dirrections for the Reformation thereof. Which directions and determinations, if consonant to the word of God, are to be receyved with reverence and submission: not onely for their agreement with the woord, but also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God, appointed thereunto in his word." Mather's draft, the document which the synod used as a basis for the ensuing platform, outlined the prevailing instruments of consociation then used in the colony. In his chapter "Of Classes and Synods" Mather had inserted the following passage:

> By classes is meant assemblies of the Elders of neighbor churches; and by Synods Assemblies of the Elders and messengers of all the Churches in a province or nation ... And such assemblies ... we doubt not to be lawfull and usefull in sundry respects, as because churches are to hold communion one with another ... and if so, then they may lawfully assemble and meet together by their elders, those assemblies of their elders being the most comodious wayes ard means, for the carrying on of such consultations.[83]

The passage was a polemic written in support of a classical order, perhaps made the more necessary by recent divisions in the colony. But the author and the ministers who had supported Norton's classical scheme in The Answer were not to have their aspirations ratified by the synod. Mather was amended, the final Platform, Chapter 17 ("Of Synods"), making no mention of separate, ministerial assemblies. Chapter 16 ("Of the communion of Churches with one another") was, in a sense, a repudiation of consociationists like Mather and Norton, reflecting, as it did, the milder propositions of John Cotton whose description of consociation in The Way formed its basis. Yet even Cotton's mild emphasis upon consociation as a responsible mode of discipline was muted before passage and the term "consociation" dropped for the less bureaucratic sounding "communion."[84]

The Cambridge Platform, completed in 1648 and long considered to represent the standard of Congregationalism in the early colony, was not an accurate representation of consociational practices among the Bay churches. Indeed, in 1648 the General Court published the Laws and Liberties of Massachusetts, a document which reaffirmed the ministers' right to associate at the very time the Cambridge Synod was rejecting the classical interpretation of consociation proposed by Mather. Perhaps the Platform can better be considered a compromise between a moderate centralism advocated by the clergy and a particularism which sought to make the congregations autonomous citadels at the expense of the colonial church and the ministerial community.

Just who those particularists were that opposed a majority of the clergy in the synod or why the clergy settled for a compromise are questions which have no simple answers. Two things are certain, however. Cotton's opposition was moderate in nature and actually functioned as the rallying point for a compromise based upon his views, for subsequent to its passage, the compromise Platform was rejected by those who found even Cotton's interpretation of consociation too strong for their tastes. Moreover, the strength of that particularistic opposition was such that the ministers found it wise to alter their stated beliefs if not their private opinions by accepting the compromise Platform.

It appears that an important source of opposition was to be found in the General Court itself. Even as a compromise, the Platform was rejected (when voted on by the General Court) by eleven town deputies, men of influence in important towns and congregations -- Salem, Boston, Braintree, Watertown, Roxbury, Wenham, Reading, Sudbury, Hampton, Weymouth and Hingham.[85] If the minister-dominated synod was an official assembly of the churches, the General Court functioned as an informal assembly, being composed of deputies elected from among church members in the towns. Although it is impossible to poll the deceased, their opposition may well have run along the lines suggested by a recent student of the Cambridge Synod who observed that "The autonomous local church went hand in hand with the self-governing town meeting.[86] If such was the case, then perhaps the particularists saw clerical pretensions and the Platform as a threat to the established balance of centralized authority and local liberties first set out in the Body of Liberties in 1641. Considering that these "fundamental" laws were compiled from numerous suggestions sent to the Court by the towns, it is apparent that the document reflected the question of this balance as it affected the town and the congregation. Understandably, the Body of Liberties took pains to define the local sphere of autonomy. Basic provisions to this end assured the towns that they could regulate their local affairs and interests as they saw fit so long as they did not impinge upon colonial authority. In the same manner the congregations were given the right to exercise the church ordinances, elect their officers, and to admit and dismiss whomever they pleased. "No injunctions are to be put upon any Church, Church officers or member in point of doctrine, worship or discipline, whether for substance or circumstances besides" the Body vaguely concluded "the Institutions of the lord." Moreover, the document recommended only the mildest form of consociation, one which exercised its influence "onely by way of Brotherly conference and consultations. That the trueth may be searched out to satisfying of every man's conscience in the light of God according to his worde." In a word, the Body of Liberties guaranteed the churches' autonomy as it guaranteed the towns the right to settle their own affairs. Thus, despite a clerical organization and a tradition of consociation, the laymen in the churches held what might be called a countervailing view of the church as an autonomous congregation established by civil law. Standing upon that autonomy when confronted by synods and a classical organization, some local churches and laymen rebelled, fearing the balance of power and liberty in the colonial church would be unwarrantably weighted in favor of centralism.[87]

Such fears had already ripened in the early 1640's when Richard Mather took issue with a correspondent who insisted that the Body of Liberties which placed the freeman in the position of "obedience to the magistrates but as their naturall right" placed him in an analagous position to the clergy in the churches.[88] Mather's extreme statement in his draft of the Platform, graphically depicting the relationship between congregation and ministers when such a relationship degenerated into a power struggle, suggests the paranoia and sense of impending violence mixed into an otherwise amicable relationship. Mather suggested, for example, that the "light of nature teaches that inferiors in all Societies may defend themselves from the unjust and outragious violence of Superiors." This very Hobbesian statement was toned down in the final draft of the Platform to read: "This power of Government in the Elders, doth not any wise prejudice the power of priviledge in the brotherhood", a statement which put the relationship somewhat more pleasantly for the sake of propriety.[89]

There was a deep-seated and perhaps mutual distrust between clergy and laymen, to judge by Mather. Prior to its ratification by the General Court the elders had been ordered to gather up all exceptions to the Platform held by various discontented colonists for resolution. The clergy's reply, "An Answer of the Elders to Certain Doubts," indicates the nature of this distrust. The elders tried to explain a church polity to men set upon exerting congregational prerogatives for the purpose of trimming away ministerial authority. Specifically, the dissenting opinionists were worried about a "dominion" being created over themselves and the possibility that a "communion" of churches was a subversive device for creating a national church. Ironically the very arguments which the elders used to refute English devotees of a national church became a Frankenstein monster which turned against the ministers, their Platform and their centralism. Almost the entire set of objections answered by the clergy were antiauthoritarian in outlook and were concerned with severely restricting (if not actually abolishing) the use of synods, with curtailing the authority vested in church-gatherings, with controlling the authority of the local presbytery, and with challenging the right of the civil authorities to meddle in church affairs.[90] Having thwarted clerical pretensions for a formal status the particularists would have dismantled the consociational machinery built by the clergy and rendered consociation powerless by tying the magistrates hands.

The state of this independent mind was cryptically recorded in the "exceptions against some things in the Synod at Cambridge, 1649" sent to Cotton shortly after the final session. The dissenters balked at the discontinued use of the term "Independent," (The clergy thought it too reminiscent of separatism and not entirely descriptive of a group of consociated churches) seeing its usage as proper "because wee do not Depend on Classis, or Synods for Determination of Church censures." The independents also reacted to a synodical proposition which, in attempting to distinguish between administrative rights of the presbytery and the congregational rights of church members, stated that the "Power of Office" cannot "Formally be [acted] by the Church."[91] Nor did the independents understand the theory of mixed government as it was applied by the synod to the churches. Such theoretical considerations were ideas that "few or noe Churches in New England doe understand." Independency meant that there was no rule which could bind churches to heed the counsel of other churches, "but as God hath left them at liberty, so they should be left: or else they be not independent indeede." Carried to its inevitable conclusion, independency meant that the Cambridge Synod and its pronouncements were not binding upon the churches. And it led, ultimately, to the rejection of synods themselves. Thus the dissenters took issue with the key pronouncement of the synod "in which they say, the Synod is an Ordinance of God from Acts 14: which Mr. Hooker doubteth of, and we also. And much more that they should have Power of Determination ... or that Determination should be Receyved."[92]

As a compromise, the Cambridge Platform failed on two counts. In the first place it pleased neither ministers nor independents.

In addition, it failed as a "modell" for it did not present a rational scheme of consociation compatible with the facts of consociated life in the colony. Neither ministers nor independents could look upon the Platform as descriptive of what ought to exist in the colony. As a result, the document was unable to promote a viable polity which could be referred to in the future when the churches faced crises which required synodical resolution. The Platform so far as consociation was concerned was useless before the ink was dry. The elders therefore would find it necessary to reconcile independent and consociational viewpoints time and time again in a colony which was experiencing rapid changes. The unresolved issues of the present and the past would be the issues of the future and the basis of religious politics in the Bay colony for decades to come.

V

The Reverend Elders: Scapegoats, 1648--1680

The years between the Cambridge Synod and the Reforming Synod, 1648-1680, were uneasy in the Bay colony, marked by controversy, scarred by divisions in the churches which had a corrosive effect upon New England institutions. The appearance of Baptists and Quakers, the growth of independency and heterodoxy in the churches, an apparent decline from the idealized standards of piety set by the first generation, and the restoration of the Stuart monarchy provided innumerable examples with which the clergy could lace their jeremiad sermons delivered to warn the colonists of "declensions" in the churches. While the brutal persecution of Baptists and Quakers has become a legendary example of the ministers' and magistrates' shocked reaction to these changing times, far too little attention has been paid to some of the other clerical measures intended to correct the declensions. The difficulties of the period were outgrowths of past problems -- notably the matters of visible faith and the authority of consociation -- while the clergy's program was an adaption of past attitudes. Yet adaption meant change and change signified declension for the colonist who believed the jeremiads. This ironic twist of the jeremiad mentality, when it was turned against the ministers, stigmatized the clergy as innovators thereby casting doubts upon their integrity and, ultimately, undermining the mystique of eldership.

While the clerical mind was a cumbersome instrument slow to change its focus, altered circumstances could force it to change. The ministers were naturally hesitant to change their views indiscriminately. But the clergy's understanding of the New England Way, especially as exemplified by the covenanted congregation, admission procedures, practices of baptism, and consociation was an adaption of English nonconformity at a given time to a given set of circumstances which would change. The ministers were cautious men. If cautious men do not change their minds very readily neither do they assert propositions without leaving room for maneuver. And that, it would seem, is exactly what the elders did on certain questions, notably on the question of church membership and infant baptism.

During the 1630's the gathered clergy had been preoccupied with reinstituting religion in a new environment. Given their concern for a church built in some measure upon visible faith, the elders' primary concern had been with organizing a colony of adults into congregations of the faithful. This position was reflected in Mather's reply to the queries sent the Bay elders from England when he suggested the major problem (organization) with which the ministers had been wrestling: "when a Visible Church is to be errected, planted or constituted, by the Appointment of Christ, it is necessary that the matter of it, in regard of quality, should be Saints by calling."[1] Preoccupied with a church covenant and adult saints, the clergy answered the question of baptizing children in terms consistent with its view of the church covenant. As Cotton had argued during the conference with Lenthall, neither faith nor baptism ("the covenant of Grace and Baptism") constituted a church but only a formal covenant.[2] Had the ministers made baptism the criterion for church membership (since they were dealing primarily with adults) they would have embraced the Anabaptist heresy, a fact they were quick to point out to their critics. "But we do not believe the Baptisme doth make men Members of the Church," Mather informed his English colleagues, "nor that it is to be Administered to them that are without the Church, as the way and means to bring them in but to them that are within the Church, as a seale to confirme the Covenant of God unto them." So far as children were concerned, "infants with us are Admitted Members in and with their Parents, so as to be Admitted to all Church priviledges of which Infants are capable, as namely to Baptisme; and therefore when Parents are once Admitted, their Children are thereupon Baptized, if they were not Baptized afore, as sometimes it falls out."[3]

Since such a formulation was intended to solve the immediate problems of organization, the clergy honestly admitted that they were uncertain about the future of the children under the covenant. "But whether they [the children] should thereupon be admitted to all other priviledges when they come of age, without any personall profession of Faith, or entering into Church Covenant, is another Question, of which by Reason of the Infancy of these Churches, we have had no occasion yet to determine what to judge or practise one way or other." The clergy recognized that their temporary formula raised numerous problems. They were uncertain how long the children should be allowed to remain in their spiritual minority. Then, too, they were not certain whether adopted children of church members were to be considered within the confines of the church.[4] In his The Answer Norton drew the line at the children of members, observing that baptism should not be extended to the children of the population at large. Yet even this formula, Norton suggested, was not without its difficulties, for the Bay elders considered it "important and desireable to reach a solution of this problem, so that we may neither sully the institutions of Christ nor impair the rights of infants."[5]

In a variety of ways the ministers were called upon to make exceptions to their rules. John Cotton was for the admission of adopted orphans and concluded, on one occasion, that the children of backsliding parents still remained within the covenant.[6] Norton, on behalf of the clergy, suggested that any child, natural or adopted, should be admitted to church membership so long as some church member was in a "loco parentis" relationship to the child. A significant number of church leaders advocated exceptions to the general rules or even went so far as advocating a return to open baptism.[7] Thomas Allen, Charlestown's pastor, was moving in the direction once taken by the discredited Lenthall. In a letter to Cotton written in the early forties he observed: "We read indeed of that people being kindled and Baptised and Continueing together and were thereuppon accounted a church." He wondered whether "any Christians in a Towne having bin baptized are not to be accounted of the church, till such time as they break out into some scandal.... There was one with us this very day Expressing himself, and many others in this country were of his Judgement."[8]

Disparate opinions marked a general apprehension among the clergy of an overzealousness in admission procedures. If, in the late thirties, a majority of the elders were prone to assure uncertain saints by advocating the use of sanctification as a test of visible sainthood, they were willing in the forties to join with the avowed Presbyterian ministers of Newbury, Parker and Noyes, in a statement on admission procedures: "Concerning the admission of members ... the rule must be so large, that the weakest Christians may bee received."[9] The clergy were not willing to relax ideal admission standards but they were interested in clearing away the tangled theological underbrush which often obscured the pathway to church membership. If, as we have found, the imexplicable mysteries of experienced faith forced the clergy to resort to externals, to a profession of faith and a confession of sins and to an increased emphasis on covenanted relations, these same externals tended to create a formalized status of the faithful more easily understood by the candidate for membership. Indeed, Norton hinted at such a formalized status and referred to those who desired admission to the Bay churches as "candidates" and noted that in the ancient church there was a threefold distinction of those who attended church meetings: "Catechumens", "Candidates" and "The faithful."[10]

The use of such terms suggests that Norton and his colleagues were developing a concern for the status of the unchurched. Perhaps they were beginning to realize that empty pews were more likely to be filled with the faithful if admission procedures were made more explicit and if nonmembers could be invested with the initiative which a recognized status provides. A provocative example of this approach is to be seen in the admission procedures of the Northampton church twenty years later. The congregation created a "state of education" replete with an oath and standards of behavior which was intended at once as an inducement to non-church members and as a way of preparing those who acknowledged their state of education for acceptance into the congregation. Yet another way in which this consciousness of status and position was applied is to be seen in the origins of a halfway covenant. In his "Modell of Church Discipline" presented to the Cambridge Synod (and rejected by the Synod) Richard Mather made a special point of that privileged position occupied by the baptized children of the congregation. This position, he observed, provided benefits of membership and fellowship which were not available to nonmembers. Having identified the child's status he would require children to "manifest their faith" prior to being accepted for full membership by the congregation. In addition he would have identified another status which carried with it an obligation -- the half-way status: "And further, such as are borne in the church as members, though yet they be not found fitt for the Lords Supper, yet if they be not culpable of such scandalls in conversation as do justly deserve church censures, it seemes to us, when they are marryed and have children, those their children may be received to Baptisme."[11]

While the majority of ministers were unwilling to accept Mather's plan in 1648, some of the churches began formalizing the status of children. The Ipswich church, for example, resolved in 1656 to "look at" children under fourteen as members of the congregation by virtue of their parent's membership. Children over that age, were to be subject to church discipline. It was considered the duty of the church elders and brethren "to instruct them, and to call upon them to know the Lord, and to carry it according to the rules of the Gospel." This educational status was, upon the child's majority, to become a covenanted status wherein those not scandalous could own the covenant although they could not participate in the sacraments. In addition and because of this half-way status, the children of these adults could receive baptism.[12] The first church in Boston (there were now two), while not resorting to a half-way status, resolved in 1657 that children of the congregation were under the power and authority of the congregation, subject to censure and education, and that "solemne notice be given to them seasonably."[13] An educational status was outlined in some detail in the Salem church's propositions treating the subject of their children.

It was agreed that the children should be instructed in the fundamentals of religion and when they reached the age of discretion they should be examined as candidates for full membership by the elders of the church.[14] Though it is not known how widespread a use was made of the educational status, the dozen or so catechisms published by ministers for use in their towns gives some indication of the concern which was being shown for the education of the young. The Reverend John Fiske of Chelmsford, for example, prepared a catechism in 1657 which stimulated a concern for the youth in that congregation for by the early sixties the church undertook an educational responsibility for the children of the church.[15]

Whether or not the churches resorted to a formal half-way covenant in their procedures, it is obvious that they were generally concerned with giving more formal recognition and encouragement to potential "candidates" for membership in their churches. Ministerial concern for the children of those adults whose ambiguous position in the churches could be clarified by a formal recognition of their half-way status was but part of a more general concern for the ambiguous position of various groups within the churches who for some reason or other were not becoming church members. The use of the educational and half-way statuses can be seen as a rational response on the part of the clergy to a crisis in the Bay's religious institutions.

If the ministers began recognizing the obligations to the children of the covenant in an effort to bring them to spiritual maturity and out of a general concern for rationalizing and formalizing admission procedures, it is apparent that the use of the educational status also was related to the problems of education faced by the colony as a whole and the primary educational institution -- the family -- in particular. Certainly increased congregational emphasis on the educational status of children was a response to an assumed decline of the family as an educational institution. While it was never assumed that a genuine psychological crisis such as the conversional experience could be "taught," the Puritan minister placed great emphasis upon education as an antidote to evil and even believed that God used education as an effective channel of grace.[16] Experience seemed to demonstrate that the children of adult believers were most likely to become saints themselves, that "God cast the line of election in the loins of godly parents."[17] At the very time that the congregations were socializing the educational status and creating ideal roles which the children could assume, a 1659 gathering of ministers directed the elders in the congregations "to call upon Parents to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and to see as much as in them lieth, that to be effectually done."[18]

As we shall presently see, the decay of the family and the unresolved status of unbaptized children were two examples of those declensions which the clergy and the government delighted to cite in sermons and pronouncements after 1660. As the clerical mind became more concerned with the future of the colony's children they resorted to the congregations for educational assistance and simultaneously began a campaign for a reformation of education in the home. Professor Edmund S. Morgan has found a good deal of the material for his portrait of the ideal Puritan family in the ministerial literature of the fifties, sixties, seventies and eighties. Perhaps the Puritan family was consciously idealized by frightened clergymen who exhorted parents and children to emulate examples of piety as an antidote to further familial decay. The colonists themselves feared a descent into "barbarism" and may well have anticipated the decreased effectiveness of formal and informal education in the latter half of the century which even included a precipitous decline in the musical education of the congregations.[19]

This brief and tentative assessment of a culture's effective staying-power concerns us here for a variety of reasons. In the first place, it puts in a proper perspective the relationship between the half-way status, the apparent decline of the family and the socialization of education in the congregation during the 1650's. Then too, it helps to explain what, for the colony's leaders, was to be their overweening concern during the 1660's -- declension. Finally it sets the stage for a consideration of the second major problem with which the clergy wrestled during the 1650's and 1660's -- creating an effective consociation of churches to serve the growing needs of the congregations and the clergy. As the ministers and lay leaders realized, an effective religion depended upon a strong ministry, an effective organization of the churches and the control of heterodoxy.

The Commissioners of the United Colonies (Massachusetts, New Haven, Plymouth and Connecticut) observed in the 1650's that an orthodox clergy was necessary to ensure the religious security of the colonies and concluded, therefore, that the towns and not just the congregations should maintain the ministers, a practice which had been introduced into the Bay colony in 1639.[20] Such support proved insufficient in some cases, so the General Court thought in the fifties, for insufficient salaries were producing "great sufferinge of the families of divers reverend ministers of Gods work, within this jurisdiction."[21] If magisterial concern was any indication of the state of the clergy in the 1650's, it is evident that the colony was facing a crisis with regard to the availability of ministers as well. The General Court, for example, forced the Second Church in Boston to wait "until the Lord sends them a suitable minister" by preventing the congregation from ordaining Michael Powell, an earnest but uneducated layman.[22] If the supply of able ministers was inadequate, it was made doubly so by the organization of new towns which demanded ministers. At times, though, the towns were slow in obtaining spiritual guidance. Thus, in 1660, the General Court was forced to give the county courts jurisdiction over this problem, instructing them to have their grand juries prosecute errant towns.[23] Inhabitants from Ipswich, Newbury, Braintree, Mendon, and Springfield and those who settled at Stony River were granted conditional permission to form new settlements with the stipulation that they would be allowed to continue as new towns only if they found able ministers to serve them.[24] In the case of

Springfield the Court had to resort to temporary measures by granting permission to layman John Pynchon to preach in the Springfield congregation which was then without a minister.[25] When Sacco, Wells, and Scarboro were organized into York County, having recently come under Massachusetts' jurisdiction, the General Court ordered that they too must "obtain some able and pious minister within six months to prevent much disorder, ignorance and profanity."[26] Yet churches like Springfield found it difficult to get ministers or even to form congregations. Perhaps it was a sign of creeping indifference to strict congregational practice that Springfield, Wells, Exeter, Portsmouth, and Sacco do not seem to have bothered with forming covenanted congregations but merely held religious services in which the entire town participated on equal terms.[27]

If the General Court passed legislation during the 1650's to cope with the primitive religious conditions in some villages, legislation was also introduced to prevent suspect ministers from preaching in the colony's churches. The first of several statutes for that purpose was the result of the celebrated controversy surrounding the ministrations of Marmaduke Matthews in the Malden church. Matthews was fined 10 L for refusing to recant errors which had been pointed out to him by a committee of elders and magistrates who had examined him. Next, the Malden church was fined 50 L after it would not convict Matthews of heresy upon the demonstration of his error by a church council.[28] In retaliation, the Court passed a law (in May, 1653) which prohibited anyone from preaching "within this jurisdiction without the approbation of the elders of the fower next neighboring churches, or of the County Court."[29] Public reaction to the law was unfavorable. The Salem church, probably led by William Hawthorne, a former duputy and now a magistrate with a history of dissent from past attempts at the civil control of congregations, filed a petition with the Court insisting that heresy was to be controlled by the churches without the aid of "other Elders or courtes of Justice."[30] Lieutenant Robert Pike of Salisbury was so incensed that he insisted he would oppose by his own authority a law which was directed "against the libertie of the countrey, both ecclesiasticall and civill."[31] The Court, surprised and chagrined by the adverse reactions of "so many persons of severall tounes, conditions and relations," rescinded the law.[32]

This was but the first act, however. The Court passed similar legislation in 1658. Suggesting that it was the duty of the Christian magistrate to control religious opinion because "every company cannot be thought able or fitt to judge of these gospell quallifications" the Court decreed that no one would henceforth be allowed to preach "to any company of people, whither in church society or not" where two adjacent churches, the magisterial council or the General Court objected to a preacher's doctrine or practice.[33] The measure was intended to serve the colony in "this houre of heterdoxie," or so the elders put it in a memorandum delivered to the Court on behalf of the bill. Once again the clergy's schizophrenic ethic of authority was invoked in support of a measure whose legitimacy was said to stem from the authority of the magistracy as nursing fathers and of the "Communion of Churches." As it stood, the bill represented an important departure from Congregational practices for it was passed on the assumption that individual congregations were not fit to determine orthodox doctrine. Moreover, the clergy saw the measure as perhaps a way of extending their own influence for they would have included a provision that a preacher should be barred from his pulpit "in case of Absent of the Elders where there shall be a non-approbation of any of the Neighbour Churches."[34]

The commotion over the case of Marmaduke Matthews and the 1653 law was another chapter in the intermittent dispute over the rights of the individual congregation and the authority of the General Court, the collective eldership, and church councils. In addition such events further polarized a Congregational ideology in support of Congregational autonomy on the one hand and of collective responsibility on the other, providing one more issue for a lively debate on consociation and related problems which was to surround the Synod of 1662.

From the elders' point of view it is apparent that an influential part of the clergy were moving towards the definition of a centralized and consociated authority ostensibly free of coercive authority but, if the minister-backed legislation is any indication of trends, ultimately beholden to the state for its sanctions. In a sense one cannot blame the clergy for seeking to place their own amorphous influence on a more secure basis and for striving to develop a mode of consociation more concrete in organization than that embodied in the Cambridge Platform. This shifting opinion was to be seen in even so ardent a Congregationalist as John Cotton who, though preoccupied during the mid-forties with the elders' encroachments upon the integrity of the individual congregation, began to see the wisdom of a strengthened, collective eldership and even went so far as to assert (in a letter written with his colleague, John Wilson, to Sir Richard Saltonstall in 1651) that coercion was a legitimate instrument of statecraft, for it was better to create hypocrites outwardly conforming to prevailing opinion than to allow heretics who disturb the churches.[35]

Ironically, while English Independents were moving towards a practical toleration of numerous sects, Bay Congregationalists were rejecting toleration, strengthening consociation by statute and trying to accomodate their polity to that of English Presbyterians. Cotton died lamenting declension. His parting words to his colleagues were a warning that the colony faced heterodox and otherwise troubled times while his parting legacy was a short treatise appended to his The Covenant of Grace addressing "certain queries tending to Accommodation between the Presbyterian and Congregationall Churches." Though in no way disenchanted with Congregationalism, Cotton now sought to maximize the potential for control to be found in a Congregational classis and in the local presbytery. Why, he asked, must Presbyterians insist on imposing the will of the classis upon the congregation by resorting to an external instrument of coercion -- the classis -- when essentially the same control could be accomplished from within. To use a phrase coined by Shepard's astute opponent in the 1641 meetings of the ministers, why create a powerful "presbytery over a presbytery" when a gathering of clergy which desired to introduce such and such a proposal in their churches could in fact operate as a presbytery over a presbytery if they used, as the basis of their authority, the prerogatives of the elders in the local presbytery. As Cotton understood this procedure, he wondered whether it would "not much conduce to a more full and cleere acceptance of ... [a classis'] Administrations, If their [the churches] Elders in the Classis did put forth no Authoritative Act, touching the Members of other Churches, but consultative onely; nor touching their owne, but (upon hearing the advice of Fellow Elders in difficult cases) to proceed each one with the Cognizance and Consent of his owne Church at home respectively?"[36]

Other ministers also recognized flaws in the existing instruments of consociation. When a part of the Hartford congregation, refusing to acknowledge the decision of a council adverse to their cause, rejected consociated authority in 1657 the clergy was helpless to do anything. John Higginson made the most of the scandal by drawing an object lesson for the New England clergy. "I see not but (upon this sad occasion) all our Elders and Churches [in New England] are called to acknowledge ... that although the doctrinall part of consociation of churches is spoken much unto in the printed bookes of our devines, yet that ther is a great defect amongst our Churches in the practicall part of it," that is in applying sanctions to a wayward congregation such as withdrawing communion from the church while yet preserving "the order, peace and edification of churches."[37] The Hartford dispute was even more perplexing since the ministers in the council had been of a different mind than the "Elders of the Bay" who had originally offered a formula of reconciliation. This raised, in Higginson's mind, the possibility that councils might err and led him to wonder about a method by which a council could be "convinced of error." Finally, he observed that "our Elders and churches" would be at a loss "in managing of such a case as this of Hartford," a statement not only prophetic of things to come but astute in its assessment of the shortcomings of the informally organized "elders" as a court of reconciliation.

The Hartford schism stemmed from the fact that congregations and laymen (and an occasional minister when it was convenient), having developed an ingrained hostility to rule by classes, were frequently unwilling to consent to ideas and solutions to problems which seemed forced upon congregations from the outside. Such, anyway, was the problem as John Eliot saw it in his _The Communion of Churches_. Lay resistance was, in fact, only one of many problems faced by the Bay congregations which Eliot would have solved by his bold, speculative scheme. Eliot's treatise was meant, so the title indicated, as "A way ... of uniting those two Holy and Eminent Parties The Presbyterians and the Congregationals" and as a means of bringing all Christian nations into "an Unity of the Faith and Order of the Gospel." While showing the usual solicitous concern for a united, Reformed Christendom, Eliot's primary concern was in organizing the foundations for supra-councils of nations in local councils, an institution which he believed would improve upon the ecclesiastical decentralization then rampant in New England. Eliot's examination of scripture had led him to conclude that there were not one but two "holy Publick Societies" to be found in the Bible, a church of believers and a council of churches. The church was a group of visible saints, a congregation whose members had combined to worship and to administer the ordinances and discipline. In addition, Eliot insisted, scripture dictated the use of "A Council in a Soceity of particular Churches in Communion, by their Representatives for their well being, and well ordering all things among them, by mutual Counsel, in Truth, Peace, and Holiness."[38] There were many varieties of corruption and temptation in a state militant which require correction. And "after thirty or forty years experience in the way of Congregational Churches, in fulness of liberty," he informed the reader, "we finde more and more need to insist upon [the use of Councils] , and that in such a fixed and ordered way, as that therby men may be tyed to attend unto Counsel." Since Christ had given ecclesiastical power to the apostles in the ancient church, it was the duty of church elders, especially the teaching elders as the "ordinary Successors of the Apostles," to create the modern equivalent of the ancient apostleship -- the church council.[39]

As a participant in the collective activities of the gathered clergy, Eliot undoubtedly recognized many deficiencies in the very fact of their informality. There was a great need for councils, he informed his audience, because of isolated churches "in remote places, long in the dark, without food and help" as there were "Disorders likewise, and insuperable distempers by long freting and burning in the botom of sundry Churches, to the greater dishonour of God." As a leading advocate of past collective activities undertaken by the elders, Eliot quite naturally believed that the present situation could be rectified by strengthening the general obligations of the collective eldership. Thus Eliot resolved the problem originally set before the elders by Thomas Lechford by giving to councils the type of superintending authority originally exercised by the apostles, thereby making a particular clergy do the work of a general clergy by the device of a council. Moreover, he resolved the conflicting roles experienced by the collective clergy who felt constrained, on occasion, to limit their collective authority because they believed that their responsibility, theoretically defined, was limited to the congregation. Eliot would have extended that obligation of the particular minister to include, in a secondary way, the community of churches "seeing the Rule of Communion of Churches doth impose upon Elders a degree of care of all the churches, especially of those within their Ordered Communion."[40]

If Eliot would extend the scope of eldership, he would have used the council to correct two other deficiencies in the present structure of eldership. On the one hand the Roxbury apostle would include ruling elders in councils thereby effecting a balance of interests by checking the tendency to "prelacy" of a learned clergy by the countervailing influence of "Morellian Democracy" he saw existing in the churches and exercised by their lay elders. A second deficiency could be rectified, Eliot assumed, by making council meetings a regular practice. Twelve teaching and twelve ruling elders would gather monthly. Giving mathematical precision to the hierarchy of councils constructed upon this base, Eliot would have gathered twelve monthly councils into a quarterly meeting of a provincial council and would, in turn, organize provincial councils into a yearly meeting of the national council. Being most concerned with the functions of the local council, Eliot catalogued the duties to be assumed by the monthly meetings to read like a list of correctives for the major difficulties being experienced by the churches in the fifties and sixties. At the local level, councils were to function within a limited and thus a manageable geographic area and would be concerned with sending missionaries to the unchurched, supplying vacant pulpits, settling differences in the local church and correcting erroneous opinions, establishing public fasts, calling decayed congregations to a reformation of their ways, and caring for the religious needs of those sub-communities which frequently separated from parent towns and churches to form new communities. Where a local council could not settle a protracted dispute, it would be referred to a provincial council and, if necessary, to the national council. Where questions of national importance must be determined which would affect all of the churches, the yearly meeting would serve (as had synods in the past) for the determination of such things as a standardized church polity.[41]

Like other Bay divines, Eliot found particularly vexing the problems of enforcing conciliar decisions in a consociated system established upon a voluntary basis. Those who would not accept censure by a local council, he suggested, and whose case had, therefore, to be adjudicated by the national council, if they likewise refused the censure of the country's supreme ecclesiastical court could be put to death by the magistracy. "Order" he argued, "is better then any of our lives. It is a greater good to preserve Order then to preserve the lives of the willful and obstinate violators." Here was the schizophrenic ethic of authority displayed in absolute and irreconcilable terms by a congregational minister faced with a dilemma caused by his devotion to voluntaryism and peace and order. So blatant was this particular expression of the irreconcilable that Richard Baxter observed, with obvious charity, that "it will be thought scarce congruous to say that Councills are only for advise, and yet that those should be suppressed who rest not in their advice." So far had one Bay divine come in facing the problems of establishing a viable colonial church that he would equate dissent in the congregations of New England with the hated Quaker heresy and advocate the same penalty for both.[42]

The problems to which Eliot addressed himself were a revealing commentary upon the crises which the Bay churches faced. The "apostles'" preoccupation with geography in particular indicates the debilitating effects of geographic isolation and the dispersion of the Bay congregations. Despite its timeliness, Eliot's program was not given serious consideration.

Though probably begun sometime in the late 1650's or early 1660's the Communion of Churches was issued privately in 1665, three years after the Synod of 1662, and was meant to stimulate discussion and perhaps serve as a focal point around which consociationists could rally. In its originality and boldness, Eliot's volume was potentially one of the sentinel works on Congregationalism in seventeenth century New England. But while his program reflected the problems of the 1650's, the volume's reception was indicative of the state of the clergy by 1665. "I thinke it better tooke with himself than with any of his Brethren" observed the sympathetic minister of Killingworth, John Woodbridge, "not because of his pride, I suppose you know him better, but the peculiar cut of his Genius; while some were smiling at it, others whispering about it, the booke, as I understand, was called in Agen and now none of them seen walking Abroad."[43] Richard Baxter, Woodbridge's English correspondent, replied that while he could not agree with Eliot's utopian penchant for mathematical precision, he was of the same mind concerning councils. Speaking of the minimal cohesion which must be achieved in New England, Baxter continued: "Unite in a few and necessary things and let reason and love procure what concord may be obtained in the rest, and what cannot be obtained must be desired and the want of it endured with Christian patience."[44] Like the observations of Woodbridge, Baxter's remarks were a commentary upon the Bay churches and the clergy: As of 1665 they were hopelessly divided over "a few and necessary things."

The division, especially among the clergy, had developed out of the fifties. Like other instruments of consociation, ministerial assemblies were experiencing considerable stress and strain. An assembly of ministers representing some of the New England churches had met at Boston in June of 1657 and a majority had recommended that a half-way covenant, insuring the rights of those children born to adult children of the first generation who were not yet full members, be introduced into the churches. The ministers were painfully aware that, unlike the elders of the late 1630's, their nonformal deliberations could not be passed off as the opinion of the rank and file in the churches. New Haven boycotted the assembly, believing that the majority of clergy "were confident they shall obtain great alterations ... in church discipline."[45] Nathaniel Mather, a son of Richard residing in England, printed the conclusions of the assembly in London and in a preface observed that no one should mistake this informal decision of a majority of the clergy as the work of the churches. It was Mather who observed that the elders' decisions of 1638 and 1639 which had been widely broadcast in print were neither the work of the collective clergy nor the opinion of the churches, thereby trying (and perhaps succeeding in his efforts) to dispel the aura of sanctity which had surrounded these collective pronouncements. In effect, Mather was insisting that private deliberations among an association of ministers were far from offical or binding upon the churches.[46]

This initial division among the clergy was carried to its sad conclusion in the Synod of 1662. On the eve of the Synod, in mid 1661, John Norton reflected the tone of the Bay elders when he observed in an election day sermon: "I beseech you let not Caesar be killed in the Senate after he hath fought it out and conquered in the field. Let us acknowledge the order of the Eldership in our Churches in their way, and the order of Councils in their way, duly backed and encouraged; without which, experience will witness that these Churches cannot long consist."[47] Perhaps to facilitate some such acknowledgement, the Bay elders delivered to the General Court a second question to be debated at the upcoming Synod: "Whither according to the word of God, there ought to be a consociation of churches, and what should be the manner of it."[48] Together with the first question to be considered by the synod -- a half-way covenant -- the question of consociation represented the larger and more fundamental issue which the Congregational community in Massachusetts Bay was asked to resolve: could a number of isolated churches and ministers of differing opinions rejuvenate the community of churches in a synod by agreeing upon a common policy of baptism and by authorizing the organization of a more effective mode of consociation? Had the ministers conducted the affairs of the synod so as to minimize a further breach among themselves and in the churches they might well have answered the question in the affirmative. Unfortunately their conduct paved the way for a more thorough and public division of the colony and of the clergy.

Almost immediately during the first session of the synod a minority of the elders formed a faction which was ably led by Charles Chauncy, president of Harvard, and Increase Mather, minister of the Second Church in Boston.[49] They were joined in spirit by John Davenport at New Haven who kept up a steady stream of objections to the conclusions reached in each of the three sessions of the synod. Propositions agreed upon by a majority of the clergy in the March session were forwarded by the dissidents to Davenport who organized a rebuttal to be presented at the June session. The June conclusions were likewise sent to New Haven where Davenport wrote a second refutation which he carried with him to Boston for the third and final session.[50] Davenport spoke in this session of his opposition to the halfway covenant in an effort to bolster the waning cause of the minority. But upon his departure for New Haven, the majority refused any more time to the dissidents and ratified the covenant which granted baptism to the children of adults who would own the covenant, profess an intellectual committment to a statement of faith, and submit to church discipline.[51]

Ratification of consociation, meanwhile, was (in fact) the choice of alternative schemes presented for debate in the final session. No doubt John Eliot presented a case for formal church councils. Old Richard Mather may well have dusted off his "Modell" for a second trial in a synod. Thomas Shepard, Jr., of Charlestown, proposed that the several churches be gathered into districts of consociation, where representatives would gather yearly in a standing council to pass judgement on outstanding controversises.[52] As it developed a majority of the clergy were more willing to open up the churches to half-way members than to impose a workable system of consociation upon the congregations. Agreement was finally reached on nothing more than a neutral statement which ratified "making use occasionally of Elders or able Brethren of other Churches; or by the more solemn Meeting of both Elders and Messengers in lesser or greater Councils, as the matter shall require."[53] Like the participants in the Cambridge Synod, the majority of the clergy favored the use of the term "communion" in place of "consociation", a fair indication, it would seem, of the state of the composite clerical mind on the question of creating a more formal bureaucracy by which to expedite the communion of churches.

Had the differences of opinion been resolved or at least left in the Synod the ministerial community might well have survived its internal divisions. But the ministers, especially the dissenting brethren, began to see their differences in terms of fundamentals. The energetic activities of the dissenters subsequent to the synod made a sham of fraternal unity and heightened discord. And by resorting to a pamphlet war with their colleagues the dissenters deepened the rift among the clergy while dragging the entire colony into the fray. The majority, for their part, forced the hand of the dissenters by refusing to give them their day in court. Because John Norton, acting on behalf of the majority, refused the dissenters sufficient opportunity to present their case in the synod, the vocal minority turned to the General Court asking if their opinions could be published. "All the answer we could get," Increase Mather informed John Davenport, "was, that we might do as we would. We count it a favour we were not commanded to be silent. You may see which way things are like to be carried."[54]

The charges and counter-charges which emerged from the ensuing war of words should not be overlooked as a primary factor contributing to the further disintegration of the clerical community, the system of churches, and a homogeneous orthodoxy. Polite language could not really mitigate the mutual hostilities which accelerated this disintegration. The majority opinion of the Synod, the dissenters insisted, was a view "contrary to our light, and it must needs be a continuall stumbling blocke in our wayes, and grievance to our consciences, because whatsoever is not of faith is sin." In stiff-necked dissent the minority assumed the posture of the guardians of tradition who could not possibly allow "a corrupt masse of unbeleevers" into the churches.

In failing to yield up their principles, the dissenters were made painfully aware of the unnatural breach which was being widened. Of devastating consequence was the rupture of family relations caused by those who "have said to our fathers and mothers, oure brethren, our kindred, that we might keepe the word of the Lord, and the Covenant of our God."[55] No mere play on sentiments, this admission represented a personal tragedy in the life of Richard Mather, prime exponent of consociation and the half-way covenant, whose sons Nathaniel, Increase and Eleazer stood opposed to what they considered the dangerous delusions and declensions of their father.

The issues drawn out in the controversy indicated two differing and irreconcilable courses charted for the congregational churches, two courses which drew mutual sustenance from a single tradition. The dissenters wished to keep alive the voluntary nature of the covenant by giving men the right to a voluntary agreement and asking them to assume the obligation of the voluntary relations which bound a church in covenant. Believing that strong congregations were founded only upon the aspirations of willing Christians who should not be forced to accept the half-way covenant, they insisted upon strengthening "the yoke of obedience, patience, and discipline ... and thes are taken upon us by way of subjection thereunto, but first it must be voluntary not inforced [.] We must take it upon our selves.... We must be willing people." The majority, to the contrary, would settle for pious and outwardly faithful inhabitants in the churches, for they believed that opening up the church covenant would prevent irreligion and apostacy in the population at large.[56] If the dissenters believed that God's people must be willing converts, the majority believed that a greater proportion of the populace must be numbered among God's people. Their convictions were equally as sincere as the minority, proceeding from the obligation felt toward the children of potential half-way members who were grossly ignorant of the rudiments of religion.

The minority felt no obligation to the populace at large. "The gospell times are in many respects times of reformation" they asserted, "that is rectifying and setling of those things right and straight, which were perverted by those under the first Testament. therefore to build so much upon the largeness of Jewish practises [as the majority was doing in opening up the churches] is as great a sin on the other hand. seeing it is a stretching and enlarging of the narrow way that leadeth unto life, to bee as wide as the broad way that leadeth most unto destruction.[57] The dissidents' "narrow way", by contrast, meant not only allegiance to the strict covenant but also restricted communion with those who they thought had abandoned the narrow way. "We thinke," observed the dissenters," that all the care of the churches, and the members thereof should be used to the utmost, to looke what church or churches they doe hold communion with... Ther were in David's time malignant churches (as there are now)." If this statement was not plain enough, the minority put the breach in unmistakable terms. Lamenting the harsh treatment they received at the hands of the majority, the dissenting brethren concluded: "we are independents. and they Presbyterians. oh how are we falne."[58] Do not be so easily persuaded by the blandishments of a majority the dissenters warned the General Court. A majority opinion is not necessarily synonymous with truth. The minority's small numbers should not be construed to mean "that we have not truth on our side." "Sometimes in Synods the Minor parte have stood up for truth when the Major part hath bin drawne away with Error."[59]

This rhetoric of dissent and division prepared the way for John Davenport's Another Essay which, by presenting clear alternatives to the synodical propositions, helped to dichotomize further the clerical mind and weaken any basis for unity among the ministers. Davenport's view of the covenanted congregation was much like that of Cotton who saw the church as the end result of the conversional experience, a position Jonathan Edwards was to take some eighty years later. Fearing for the integrity of the congregation, Davenport was apprehensive about the possible loss of that integrity in a formal consociation of churches. Far from attacking the communion of churches, he attacked the formal consociationists with a variety of procedural questions. How many churches must covenant together for purposes of consociation? Were there to be set meetings? Was consociation to be confined to the elders or were laymen to be included? Must churches always acquiesce when censured by neighboring churches. Clearly Davenport feared that congregations would have to bow to regional opinion when that opinion might contain fundamental errors such as those recently ratified by the synod. Truth and peace, he observed in conclusion, had been accomplished as past experience indicates under present procedures which still seemed adequate.[60]

Richard Mather and Jonathan Mitchell replied to Davenport in support of the synodical propositions and a more formal consociation. They would not go so far as Shepard in proposing a formal instrument of consociation but they wished to have it understood that consociational authority was of no mean proportions. Like John Eliot, who argued as early as 1641 that voluntary consent among participating congregations provided the basis for the consociated authority of synods, councils, and classes, Mather and Mitchell insisted that so long as the churches agreed to abide by the decision of a classis derived from the consent of the governed, there could be no classical or Presbyterian jurisdiction in the accepted sense of the term.[61] Though the two authors intended something substantially different from "consociation" as understood by Davenport, they chose to consider as perverse his opposition to an ideal unanimously ratified by the recent synod. "It seems strange," they observed in their parting shot, "that Brethren should be willing to contend both where _they do differ_, and where _they do not_." By such asperasions, the majority hoped to persuade wavering minds. Mitchel and Mather cleverly manipulated the notion that Congregationalism was a "middle way" to assert that the Half-Way Covenant lay halfway between the extremes of a closed and an open covenant. Thomas Allin, meanwhile, encouraged by the elders, tried to isolate the dissenters from the congregational mainstream by reviewing the history of the new covenant. Allin represented the pragmatic face of the majority, insisting that "there is no falling from former practice.... It is the way of Christ in the Gospel, to set up the practice of his Institutions as the necessities of the people call for them."[62] Recognizing in the elders an adaptive clerical mind, Allin observed "that the most Eminent Elders in the most considerable Churches" had come to accept the half-way covenant by 1648. Those who now supported the dissenting brethren, he concluded, were turn-coats who do not remember what they had once preached.[63]

The campaigns mounted by the majority and the dissenters meant that clerical solidarity was no longer a major concern for the clergy. Clearly they had agreed to disagree rather than accomodate their differences. The dispute among the ministers was as serious as that conflict precipitated by the Antinomian controversy, yet there was a fundamental difference between the two: whereas the clergy willingly balanced the claims of the individual conscience against the interests of the group in 1637, the claims of the individual conscience became, at least for the minority, the only consideration by 1665. Truth was no longer seen as the result of collective deliberations but as the exclusive property of one or another of the parties. Truth was no longer to be equated with the opinion of a majority which would seek accord with dissenters. Thus the ethic of accomodation and the ideals of "unity and verity" so laboriously defended by the first generation of ministers disintegrated as the elders fell to haggling and backbiting, accusing one another of double-dealing, bad faith, and of harboring disreputable motives. The result was the disintegration of those cordial relations which bound the ministerial community together and made accomodation possible. But what was lost to the community of ministers was gained by the individual clergyman. Where theology-by-committee failed, it opened the way for individual clergymen to emphasize more fully their unique creativeness. And though orthodoxy was bound to fragment, fragmentation permitted theological variety and greater freedom of individual expression.

Although he resorted to gutter tactics to make his point, John Davenport was a more eloquent advocate of the individual conscience than Roger Williams, precisely because it pained him so much to have to assert his own values in the face of the majority. Davenport saw his opponents as men with "distempered affections and passions" who subverted truth and thus pleaded for peace when they could no longer plead for truth. This state of mind he attributed, in particular, to "the Reverend Elders in and about Boston", those ministers who had always been the most active members of "the elders" and who chose, on this particular occasion, to make a public reply to a treatise Davenport had sent to them privately for their scrutiny.[64] Despite his haggling, the New Haven elder ultimately rested his case on the sanctity of his conscience, "for my maker gave me my Being and hath preserved [me] hither that I should Beare witness to the truth, as Christ said ... and he added every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Now if I should withhold my testimonie [to] that truth which I have receaved from Christes voice (as I humble conceave) I should forfeit my Being which that I may not doe[.] I purpose, with the helpe of Christ without whom I cann doe nothing, to declare freely that which appeares to me to be the truth, setting before me onely the Glory of god and the Common good and Benefitt of the Church of Christ."[65] Where Williams had argued against the suppression of heresy, Davenport presented a more profound argument for toleration. How do you muzzle a man of reputation and integrity who cannot assent to a majority without committing intellectual suicide? That Davenport felt his very "being" threatened meant he considered capitulation as devastating a destruction of the values by which he identified his way of life as death itself.

Judging by the vehement reactions of Davenport and his dissenting colleagues it is evident that the rupture in the Synod of 1662 signaled the breakup of the clerical community and a commitment to the forms of Christian unity. When men can no longer adjust their values to those of their colleagues without doing great violence to their own integrity, severe dislocation is in the wind. Such were the divisions in the ministerial community and in the community of churches that communal relations were sabotaged as congregation pulled against congregation and minister against minister. Effective consociation was doomed to failure where consensus and the ideal of unity were willfully replaced by acrimony. The situation was summed up by Davenport who caustically observed in a fitting epitapth to the synod which became a prophecy for the future: the "ministeriall light of a Synod, is surely not Infallible, nor forbidding all after-Disquisitions."[66]

So great was the breach in the ministry that it became one of the many sins in the catalogue of declensions which anxious ministers outlined in public sermons as the proofs of God's controversy with New England. By 1665 colonial leaders were harping upon the theme of "declension" when a nameless pratictioner of the jeremiad put the problem plainly enough for all to see in his "An Enquiry into the Reason Why God contends with his people in this country." "Oh New England Awake," he intoned, "Its high time to prepare to meet our God, least He that hath so long been among us as a moth come against us as a Lyon." What were the sins which must be rectified? "The Ministeriall Light of the country is disregarded." "It may be lamented His former Synods have been Suspected and despised, [such as the Cambridge Synod] by which the Platforme of Church Discipline was drawn out of the word of God As if it were a crime to establish Religion by Law.... And from the Last Synode [many are disregarding] the Subject of Baptisme and Consociation of Churches."[67] John Higginson, preaching the election sermon of 1663 -- "The Cause of God and his People in New England" -- suggested how God's cause could be served in a reformation of religion. Reformation to Higginson meant re-establishing a spirit of unity and community in the churches, a spirit akin to a tribalism admirably expressed, he thought, in the present company which he addressed "the heads of our Tribes, the Honoured Magistrates, and Deputies of the Colony, the Reverend Elders of the Churches, and a multitude of other Godly People."[68]

The themes of declension, decay, disintegration, and reformation were echoed in the pronouncements of the General Court which established days of humiliation and fasting to be observed in the churches. Though long an established practice, the churches were now more and more frequently asked to pray that the anticipated hostilities of the newly established Stuart monarch might be forestalled. They were to humble themselves "for the many and great sinns and evill of the country, as our unprofitablenes, neglect, and indisposednes to full inquirey and practice of the order of the gospell; the great ignorance and inclination of the rising generation to vanity, prophanes and disobedience; the sinfull indulgence in family government." When bad harvests indicated divine displeasure, the churches were instructed to seek forgiveness for God's "sharpened stoakes", for "our sweete union [turned] to much disunion, our fruitfull seasons to seasons some times threatening to withold the rains as at present ... out spirits many wayes exercised as to events and unsettled as to trueths of great consequence, the clearness of judgment being greatly advantagious not only to churches but the good of familyes."[69] In one way or another the jeremiad summed up the disintegration of family discipline and the divisions of the churches which magnified the fears and anxieties of a public already upset by unsettled truths and unclear judgment displayed by the synod.

The ministers tried to checkmate declension by creating the circumstances for unity. In his election sermon of 1663, Higginson for example, called for an improved communion of churches, a common catechism, a single confession of faith, a common covenant, and the use of frequent councils to guard against the abuses which might arise out of such an imposed uniformity.[70] The elders, in their meetings, introduced a series of fasts in the Bay area churches to bring the congregations to a better spirit of reformation.[71] But the gathered clergy overplayed their hand. Resorting to their collective, superintending authority, they seemed like prelates to church members jealous of their liberties and conditioned to the point of equating prelacy with those other signs of a degenerating congregationalism which had earned God's displeasure. In a society where truth was out of joint and the public imagination inflamed by an irresponsible use of the jeremiad (its use might be compared to the clergy's later manipulation of the witchcraft hysteria), the gathered clergy's measures of reformation generated an unexpected reaction. The colony only needed an event to crystallize an anticlericalism which was feeding upon the disputes of the synod. Hence, when the elders tried to exert their authority during a bitter division in Boston's First Church, they reaped an unexpected whirlwind.

The First Church was but superficially united on the question of baptism. When the adult non-members (who were the children of the covenanted members) were called before the church on January 20, 1660/61, a vocal portion of the membership objected, although they had formerly agreed to abide by a majority decision of the church which favored a half-way covenant. The alignment of the factions was recorded by John Hull, Boston merchant and church member, in his diary. Members opposed to an extension of the church covenant were those who opposed calling John Owen from England to replace the recently deceased John Norton, a call which had been enthusiastically ratified by the Reverend Elders. By 1664 Hull could identify a growing party in his and other churches whose position involved "Disacknowledgement of the ordinance of councils, and that great breach of ministerial judge[ment] ... Nonacknowledgment of the children of the church to be members thereof, nor taking care that their knowledge and life might answer their relation, is also manifest."[72] Waiting for Owen proved impractical, that English Independent having decided by 1666 that he could live more securely in restoration England "not from hopes of better times there, but from fears of worse here."[73] Looking for a replacement the First Church turned to John Davenport who jumped eagerly at the chance to end his days in the colony's chief pulpit. Davenport's leadership of the "antisynodalia" minority of ministers and the underhanded method by which a part of the Boston church secured his dismission from the New Haven church caused a minority of the Boston congregation (led by Hull and Edward Rawson, the colony's secretary) to seek first the reconciliation of their differences and then, when this failed, to seek the right to withdraw and form a third church.

Boston's Third Church was eventually formed in 1669 but only after "the elders" had intervened on behalf of the faction hostile to Davenport. The scandal of a church divided for over two years (from 1667 to 1669) by the dispute had meant, as John Eliot put it, that it was "high time for the elders to interpose." Interpose was exactly what they had done. Working through two councils, the clergy had paved the way for the Third Church's organization. Hesitant magisterial consent had been finally procured because, as one unhappy magistrate put it, "you have the Elders and other magistrates consent."[74] Formation of the Third Church was a victory for consociationists, a triumph of the synodical party, and a blow to Davenport from which he never recovered. Above all it was a triumph for those in the First Church who believed that the children of the covenant should be subject to the discipline of the church.[75] Nevertheless it was a hollow victory tainted by deep and unhealed divisions in the community. In the long term the triumph of the Third Church further fragmented the religious community.

By 1670 the entire colony was divided over the growing number of issues debated but unsettled during the 1660's. Culminating in the First-Third church struggle, this division was marked by two parties. The one generally opposed the half-way covenant and the authority of consociation, the other was interested in securing an ecclesiastical system embracing and disciplining the second and third generation descendants of old-line church members and more securely united by consociation. This alignment prompted bitter and symbolic acts and on occasion produced bizarre bedfellows. Governor Bellingham left "my whole Estate in Winnesimit" to the support and encouragement of ministers faithful to the principles of church discipline "which are practiced in the First Church of Christ in Boston." When the authorities began harassing Boston Baptists, the much maligned First Church came to the support of their fellow dissenters "as if it had been for their best friends in the world."[76] This breach brought about more desperate measures from the elders who censured John Davenport and John Allin (the other First Church minister) in a five-point indictment for their underhanded dealings and generally testifying "against thes deceitfull and false wayes with all due abhorrency against them ... desiring with bleeding hearts and faces full of shame to humble our soules before the Lord, who hath justly left these Elders unto soe great a scandall."[77]

Even these mutual and bitter recriminations did not sate the colony's capacity for vituperation. The "antisynodalia" faction, a majority in the General Court, brought in a committee report in May of 1670 which publicly laid the charge of declension at the elders' feet. Never before had the clergy been so humiliated as they were by this public and official censure. If we can understand that the canons of political and social thought valued stability above all communal virtues and included reverence for the clergy as a public obligation which encouraged stability, it is not difficult to understand that a loss of confidence in the clergy was a shattering blow not only to the foundations of clerical prestige but to the foundations of society itself. Therefore it is hardly surprising that the clergy reacted by going to the country, helping to elect partisans to the General Court which met in May of 1671. The elders demanded and got an apology in an address to the government which clearly stated what they considered to be the pernicious results of the public censure.

The colony of Massachusetts Bay, the ministers reminded the Court, was established by a civil polity "which is in the constitution of it every way accommodated unto a peaceable and prosperour enjoyment and improvement of all, both civil and religious rights, liberties and priviledges as a people."[78] A second premise dear to the hearts of the ministers suggested that the colony was established "not only by the hands of Moses, but of Aaron; we meane that first ancient and reverend ministry whom God hath signally ouned and honored before the world, as the instrument of the transportation of the arke of the covenant." At this moment, the clergy continued, the single most important interest is "our standing under Gods covenant as his covenant people, and the whole divine right of that covenant as it is to be regularly and orderly dispensed to the proper subject of it in the administration of doctrine and worship." In effect, this meant establishing Congregationalism as the founders had intended and "utterly disclayming ... all spurious principles and practices, as those of separation, Anabaptisme, Morellian (anarchicall) confusion, and licentious tolleration, which is no part of our cause, nor of the end and designe of the Lords faithfull servants."

"This solemne profession we make as a vindication of our integrity and innocency, from the unjust charge of innovation, which, with a loud cry and clamour of apostacy, is laid upon the generality of the ministry of these churches," charges supposedly substantiated by the committee report which had declared that the ministry, in negating the Congregational rights and liberties of the churches, perpetrated "an usurpation of a lordly and praelatticall power over God's haeritage, subvertion of gospell order, and all this with a dangerous tendencie to the utter devastation of these churches."

In point of fact there was no basis for this inflamed rhetoric, the elders claimed. They were among the victims of a mass hysteria, they shrewdly observed, recognizing that the deep insecurities and fears created by twenty years of growing divisions, scandals, schisms and heterodoxy had emerged as collective paranoia and guilt in the churches which leading opponents had projected upon the ministers, making them the scapegoats for every conceivable ill in the colony. The "antiministeriall spirit that too much runs through the country" (as the Court described this phenomenon in its reply to the elders) the clergy rightly assessed as a "loading so great a part of the magistrates, churches, and elders with the guilt and scandall of that which they [the clerical detractors] suppose to be the great and criminall sinn of the times, that they may (as they say) free both themselves and the country from guilt."[79] Ironically that sense of guilt had been planted by the clergy themselves, by the ministers of both parties who, in seeking to strengthen the churches, demanded the emulation of a Golden Age to be found in that early New England from which, they felt, the colony had recently declined. A majority of the clergy had sought reformation by use of the half-way covenant and consociation only to run headlong into congregations and towns which had come to understand their place in a decentralized colony as self-sufficient "autonomous" congregations, buttressed in their self-sufficienty by the rhetoric of theoretical Congregationalism.

It had become apparent over the past twenty years that an informal clerical establishment was incapable of creating the sort of "unity" desired by the clergy. But as a majority of the clergy pushed for a better and more thorough mode of consociation they only succeeded in eroding that homogenity which had once been the source of their strength. Hoping for a consociation of churches, the clergy, through internal divisions and the antagonism of a substantial minority in the colony, undermined their own position in the colony thereby seriously weakening the community of churches.

Thomas Shepard assessed the damage in his classic jeremiad delivered at the Court of Elections in May of 1672: "Eye Salve or a Watchword From Our Lord Jesus Christ." Shepard's thesis, stated early and repeated often, was an appeal to reform the colony in the light of recent events. "Religion [is] ever best established, and flourisheth when there is a concurrence of the Magistracy and Ministry together to promote the true worship of God, and to suppress what is contrary thereunto." In a passage which mixed hope with despair, Shepard dreamed of a colony in which men should "preserve and improve" upon their experiences, developing a strong religion both by virtue of law and by ecclesiastical discipline in the churches and in councils, ignoring meanwhile, the recently arisen "spirit of soverign, unsociable, rigid independency growing upon a people." If Massachusetts Bay is to reclaim itself, the colony must once more gather itself under the "uniting Conduct of those two great Ordinances of God, the Magistracy and Ministry."

It was important, Shepard continued, to reassert established procedure as practiced among the first generation when "Magistrates and Ministers" met together "in way of advice.... I here intend the agreement that there was between the Civil and Ecclesiastical Leaders in matters of difficulty, or weight.... [T]hose at the helm of the civil state were wont to make use of the Ministry, and the Ministry again of the Magistrates ... and often have they found the blessing of God upon them in this way, both in the first of this Colony and after its constitution, both in the Legislative and Executive parts of government." If Shepard hoped for a reinvigorated partnership between church and state, he also proposed a return to the Golden Age of the Reverend Elders. Referring to his childhood he observed: "Again there might be seen Ministers and Ministers cleaving together in way of communication; nothing that was difficult, or questionable, or weighty, or New or that had an influence upon the whole, but they were wont to consult with one another; as I have heard from divers of the ancient Ministers of Christ now with God, and when I was a Child I have observed in my Father's house: if there hapened to be some misunderstanding at any time, it was reasoned out placidly, and still Ministeriall communication was maintained; and these things are known unto hundreds yet living that may remember the Ministers meetings, in the several Towns by course, as at Cambridge, Boston, Charlestown, Roxbury, etc. when and where the people did with great joy, and reverence acknowledge them and their labours that way for the good of the churches."[80]

Shepard had the dubious distinction of publicly proclaiming the declension of yet another Puritan institution -- The Reverend Elders -- by diagnosing the problems of the gathered clergy in the parlance of a guilt-ridden generation. Though he and his colleagues continued to meet on a regular basis, Shepard recognized that the charisma of the collective clergy was on the wane because a divided ministry no longer had the support of the magistrates or the respect of the people. If the clergy had been made scapegoats much of the blame rested upon their own shoulders, upon their inability to heal breaches in the ministerial community which, in a reasonable measure at least, had united their fathers who were dedicated to the ideals of "unity and verity."

VI

Three Faces of Congregationalism
1680--1710

It is perhaps absurd to perform a requiem for the living, but those who would mark the passing of an institution or an age have no concrete remains upon which to wait before tolling the bell. In the case of the Reverend Elders life ebbed away slowly over two decades. The gathered clergy's authority was but a faint reminder of that prestige and influence exerted by a first generation of ministers. Although it is necessary to recognize that the jeremiad mentality which identified change as "declension" was a contributory factor in diminishing clerical prestige, what in its entirety was viewed by contemporaries as declension can be looked at from a distance of three centuries as necessary change in a period of transition for the churches and ministry. The New England Way stood at a crossroads; the Bay clergy were making decisions forced upon them because it was necessary to alter ecclesiastical institutions in the face of new realities. It was the nature of the proposed measures of reform and the manner in which they were presented which marked this new age as one unlike that dominated by the Reverend Elders. A segment of the population and a few ministers chose to view the community of churches in terms of a growing independency while others chose to think of the churches as a single entity or as a cohesive federation. All points of view owed something to the preceding generation of clergymen -- the Reverend Elders. Yet without a clerical matrix, differences were accentuated and Congregationalism fragmented into three recognizable components: independency, neopresbyterianism, and voluntary associationalism. An era had passed when differences were seen as a matter of degree or accommodated for the sake of "verity and unity."

The constellation of phrases, images, and attributes -- those reference points which help locate the phenomenon of a collective clergy in the early Bay colony -- had lost much of their relevance by the 1680's and 1690's. "The Reverend Elders" and their ambiguous authority meant something quite difference in 1680 than it did in 1640. The terms "elders" and "the elders" were slowly being replaced in the colonial lexicon by the singular and plural occupational title "minister."[1] With this reversion to the less significant title one suspects the old biblical connotations lost meaning for the general populace, to be remembered by only a few of the old inhabitants. The process of change was accelerated by the pessimism of the jeremiad which gave meaning and emotional content to yet another example of God's controversy with New England. Geographic dispersion of congregations and ministers precipitated a fragmentation of the ministerial community and though no general rule can be extrapolated from John Davenport's controversy with the Bay area elders, it is apparent that differences of opinion were also fragmenting the clergy into interest groups which developed in the colony's separate geographic areas. Divines such as John Eliot, John Wilson and Richard Mather continued to lead the ministerial community, but with their deaths (during the late 1660's and early 1670's) leadership passed to a generation more conditioned to the realities of fragmentation.

To be sure, "the elders" continued to exert their collective functions. The Barnstable church and town addressed a plea "To the Reverend Elders" in 1678, seeking their help in locating a new minister. In such professional concerns a clerical organization was always important.[2] Yet, on another occasion in 1677, the elders were reduced to an admission of their impotence. Addressing the Woburn church in an attempt to help the congregation decide the matter of admitting a candidate who had left the church, been rebaptized by a Baptist conventicle and now desired readmission, they observed: "There are many differences among the people of God, consistent with mutual communion." "Entire unity of Judgement among the godly is reserved to heaven." Creeping relativism seemed to be sanctioned by their admission of a variety of judgments. "There is much occasion of unsettlement among weak Christians," they mused "rising from the differences of godly, leading and learned men." Though they delivered a forthright opinion rejecting the claims of the repentent Baptist, the clergy were no longer sure of their right or authority to instruct. "Wee know it may sometimes be prudence not to urge the practice of our own judgements over-violently, and in this matter we would avoid laying a stumpling block before any," they observed by way of preface, indicating a hesitancy which was fatal to their cause.[3] The elders' collective responsibility had deteriorated to such an extent that William Hubbard, writing his history of New England in 1680, observed that the churches' "usual way of ending all differences, is by the improving help of neighbour churches, who, by their elders and messengers meeting together, are wont to deliberate and give their advice concerning any matter of difference; in which case, where there appeared an unanimous consent in the said messengers, all parties concerned were found always ready to acquiesce therein."[4] The extemporaneous authority of the elders was being replaced by church councils in which laymen were beginning to exert their influence.

A visitor to the Bay colony in 1674 observed that "The Government both Civil and Ecclesiastical is in the hands of the thorow-paced Independents and rigid Presbyterians." The clergy, he noted, were an imperious oligarchy who "receive your gifts but as an homage or tribute due to their transcendency." Yet a new minister to the colony, whose character had been tarnished by detractors in his native Virginia, refused "to confer with the elders about such things," observing that he would be judged only by established judicial procedures in the "church or Court."[5] While the elders were called into conference when the charter was being vacated in 1685, they were conspicuous by their absence at the General Court meeting to proclaim James II, King of England. Such now was the vaunted congruency of interests postulated by

John Cotton that the clergy were not drawn up with the magistrates and the people as they had been assembled for the proclamation of Charles II, King of England.[6] Nor were the clergy honored by the remnants of the elect. Joshua Scottow revealed the bitterness of an old and pious layman towards the elders: "As for our Reverend Elders far be it from us in any manner of way to rebuke," he began as he launched one of his pathetic tirades against the impiety and declension for which he believed the clergy in part responsible.

Such were the examples of decayed eldership. How had "God's Covenant People" reached so desperate a state of affairs? Scottow was quick to quote John Norton, observing that "originally [the colony] was a Plantation Religious not a Plantation of Trade." But "declension" could be attributed also to inadequate discipline in the churches, especially as exemplified in the disappearance of the ruling elder as a functional part of the presbytery, and in the elimination of those dual ministers, the teaching and preaching elders.[8] The deacon had become the symbol of the emerging order. He was a congregational official elected by the laymen who held the purse strings and who found it necessary to reprove young pastors educated in the most fashionable ideas of the new day, ideas which did not always square with traditional congregational values.[9] Outside pressures, for example from the merchant class, made traditional doctrines such as the "just price" less viable in the latter part of the century.[10] Politicians were no longer so ready to draw a "cloak of religious fundamentalism" around their causes and actions.[11] Where values were inapplicable and theology less vigorously pressed by the single minister of a vitiated presbytery, the view of laymen predominated.

Significantly the vertical chain of communication by which the gathered clergy had disseminated values was weakened in all of its links. A *de facto* "presbytery over a presbytery" such as the "Reverend Elders" constituted was being decimated top and bottom. About 1680 John Higginson declined an invitation to join the elders in deliberations because he was afraid (having no fellow minister) that he could find no one to supply his vacant pulpit if perchance he had to stay overnight in Boston. Besides, he rationalized, "I doubt not but the Elders about Boston will be there, and there will be no need of me."[12] If Higginson at Salem found it inconvenient to travel to Boston, the Massachusetts Bay clergy in the outlying towns which had mushroomed in what is now New Hampshire and Maine and across the mountains in the Connecticut River Valley undoubtedly found that they could afford to meet with their colleagues but once a year (if that often) at the Court of Elections in May. Geographic dispersion prevented the formation of a truly representative, collective eldership. In 1640 but a few ministers had found it inconvenient to attend ministerial meetings. By the latter part of the century "the elders" constituted only a small (if significant) gathering of the clergy centered, as Higginson observed, around Boston.

The reverend John Woodworth, in correspondence with Richard Baxter, understood the temper of the period. "Wee live in such a soil as will hardly ever bear a classis," he complained. His observations in support of this point were astute:

> Because the Revenues of the ministry for the Generality are but enough to keep them and theirs alive at home. 2. Because the people are growne so rude, Insolent and Coltish (Independency has so fatted them) that the Ministers that have most Authority have not enough to stamp a Judgment and sentence of good mettall to make it currant with them. 3. Because the ministers cannot wholly give themselves to the work of the church both at home and Abroad for their many Necessary Avocations to wait upon the things of this world. He that would thrive, shall we saye, or live in the Country, must be of all Trades, and should many ministers attend the many occasions of guiding other flocks abroad Their owne Cowes would be starved at hom. 4. Because the plantations in this Colony Especially [In Connecticut], are too remote for Convenient Assemblying, the good Land lying in Independent spots seems to be cut out for Independent Churches. But the Inconvenience would be in part removed were all the ministers of one mind, but those that can digest a classis are but sprinkled here and there.[13]

Moreover, there could be no consensus on fundamentals so long as New England remained in its present state. Churches internally divided on the question of baptism and the admission of members were dichotomizing, forming separate congregations in which one opinion or another could prevail in peace. Simon Bradstreet supplemented his cousin Woodbridge's correspondence with Baxter, supplying some observations of his own. Quakers and Baptists were vigorously pushing their tenets upon the towns people and thereby destroying the "peace and wellfaire" of the churches. In addition, "A great part of the Country is inclining to

Morellinisme, or rigid independency; those that professe the Congregationall way are not alike minded in some necessary and essentiall poynts of Church Government." The "grand Dogma" among these independents, Woodbridge added, "is that a Councell has no decisive power" while in questions of truth and error they believe that "Every Church-Species has more formall power then an oecumenicall Council."

"The true reason why Independency has kept its owne so long is because the Churches are such a heavy stone at the ministers leggs that they cannot fly their owne Course." The tension between localism and the common interests of the churches had led, Woodbridge observed, to a protracted debate on the nature of the church. "The basis of all Controversyes in the (I may Call it an) Howling wildernesse is this one Question whether The Church of Christ upon earth is to consist in Independent and particular Species or no."[14]

If religion was on the decline, it was the Congregationalism of the orthodox theoreticians and their party -- the Mathers and the Scottows -- which was in fact suffering. Neither the opinions of laymen or lay religion were in decline. In fact the very opposite was true. Unless one is willing to insist that only ministers are religious, worship properly, and should influence church polity and discipline, then it is apparent that the post-eldership period in the Bay colony was an age of religious ferment -- the age of the layman. The clergy's very complaints about "independency", the Baptists, and the Quakers suggests that ideals at the very heart of New England Puritanism -- namely the sanctity of the particular church, the fellowship of adult Christians, the mystical experience -- were enjoying a resurgence after the period of a fairly cohesive state church and "covenanted" nation ruled over by the Reverend Elders. Indeed, a particularist's outlook was congenial to some clergymen whose interests did not run beyond the town and the congregation. In the meantime, particularistic congregations no longer ruled by a strong presbytery could exert the laymen's ideals. And those whose tastes ran to the mystical or who would withdraw into purer fellowships could form their own congregations and rebaptize converts from the more traditional churches.

Yet even the more orthodox Congregationalism was experiencing a rejuvenation. While many ministers lamented the passing of a Golden Age, some reworked the ideals of religious unity and collective clerical responsibility in an attempted readjustment to the realities of the late seventeenth century. In response to geographic dispersion and the deprivations of King Phillip's War (1675-1676) ministerial associations sprang up on a geographic basis. It was the fond hope of Increase and Cotton Mather that they could gather these groups into a new organization expressive of collective clerical leadership. On the frontier in the Connecticut River Valley, Solomon Stoddard posited a more aggressive, presbyterian form of consociation. John Wise, meanwhile, represented those town-oriented clergymen who, while they distrusted centralization, hoped to reintroduce traditional congregational values into the churches.

The three faces of Congregationalism presented by the Mathers, Stoddard, and Wise, while all drawn from a common heritage, actually divided the New England Way into those three primary components already mentioned: voluntary associationalism; neopresbyterianism; and Independency. Given the factional nature of the early eighteenth century clerical community, it is apparent that Solomon Stoddard and John Wise presented their views as alternatives to the Congregationalism of the Mathers. But while these alternatives were presented to the colony because of personal rivalries and animosities between the ministers involved in the redefinition of the New England Way, our concern here is with the different uses they made of their common heritage in response to their relative situations in the colony.

Stoddard presented his opinions in 1700 in The Doctrine of the Instituted Churches, answering those two vexing questions over which the Bay clergy had worried for seventy years -- the relevance of the church covenant and the proper mode of extra-congregational organization. Stoddard had attended Harvard College during the height of the controversy surrounding the half-way covenant and consociation (1660-1664). During that period he no doubt drew his own conclusions on such matters for he was reading deeply on questions of church polity and, judging by his booklist, found Samuel Rutherford, the Scottish Presbyterian, especially to his liking. Rutherford had been an adamant critic of the New England Way and his Due Right of Presbyteries (London, 1644) which Stoddard owned was an extensive and detailed critique of Bay congregationalism.[15] By 1677 Stoddard had opened the Northampton congregation to all inhabitants of the town, doing away with the elaborate set of statuses and ritual by which the congregation had hoped to draw members of the community-at-large into the covenanted congregation. Twenty-three years later the Northampton minister justified his innovations in the Valley by publishing his elaborate rationale for these acts and redefining Congregationalism to his own satisfaction.[16]

Assuming that the evidence of saving grace and its outward manifestations were not visible by any objective standards, Stoddard concluded that gathered churches of the visibly elect were no purer than were community-based churches which realistically admitted that some of their members were hypocrites. In denying the existence of a meaningful covenanted relationship, Stoddard was doing much more than further relaxing the standards of church membership which in some measure had already been relaxed during the 1640's. Stoddard insisted that the religious community was the matrix of religious man and the source of his faith, a position quite like that of the first generation of English ministers before they migrated to the Bay colony. The church as a social institution was seen as the natural environment in which natural man, as a potentially religious person, realized this potentiality. "The light of Nature," Stoddard informed his reader,

> teaches us that man was made for the Worship of God, that man is fitted for society, and the great end why he is so is that in Society he may carry on the worship of God.... it is most agreeable

> to the light of nature that they that are one people, should Unite together in carrying on God's worship.[17]

Though denying the scriptural legitimacy of the church covenant, Stoddard in fact returned to the very earliest position held by the first generation of Bay ministers -- the belief in the efficacy rather in the form of a covenant, that is an understanding of the invisible covenant which is the real efficient force binding a congregation together:

> A Congregational Church is a Church that is bound by the appointment of God to assemble together in one place. in a constant way for the Celebration of his Publick Worship ... It is pleaded that nothing else can bind a free people one to another but an Ecclesiastical Covenant; but there is somewhat else that binds a free People in the same Town to mutual subjection, to the Government of the Town; and tho Christians are a free People, yet they have not a Licentious Liberty but are bound by God, and likewise by their own profession to the Rule of the Godspel.... The members of a Congregation are bound to carry on the Worship together, this is God's appointment, that his People that live together should carry on his Worship together.[18]

A church, Stoddard insisted, was essentially a "Congregative Body" rather than a covenanted body.[19] It was the communal tie natural to a group of friends, neighbors and the kin group living in one locality which is the cement of the religious community. If the early Bay elders translated social relations in their English parishes into the ideal of a covenanted relationship which they insisted, after a period of residence in the New World, must be formally imposed by a covenant, Stoddard was following the lead of those who in later years sought to extend the church beyond its narrow confines. Stoddard went one step beyond them, however, for his congregation was open to the community. But in terms of a congregation's functions, both Stoddard and the early Bay ministers were seeking answers to the same basic question: what is the social relationship which binds earnest church members in an effective expression of the visible church militant. The early Bay clergy opted for the covenanted church that the militant church might be better organized. Stoddard favored the uncovenanted congregation that the militant church might include those who were being excluded to the detriment of the church and the town.

In negating the church covenant Stoddard denied the sectarian mentality to be found in Congregationalism. He was interested in a national church and therefore employed a different covenanted relationship with God -- the national covenant. While the Bay clergy had spoken vaguely though warmly of New England as a covenanted nation like Israel, this was understood allegorically and depicted by a legalistic metaphor which expressed a sense of New England's uniqueness. Stoddard, on the other hand, if he did not choose to institutionalize the national covenant, chose to use the concept of a national or public covenant as an incisive analytical tool by which to see the colony and its churches as essentially a homogeneous religious community. Drawing together traditional Congregational arguments with this device, he observed that "the Foundations of Synods is partly that Publick Covenant which is between God and his People partly his Institution in the Old Testament and partly the Rules laid down from the Churches to walk by in the New Testament." A national or public covenant solved some traditional problems for a clergy working within the confines of the church covenant. Thus Stoddard answered the basic dilemma of New England eldership and dissolved the ambivalence of extra-congregational clerical authority by choosing to consider the churches under the national covenant as one church. "The Publick Covenant shews that the whole must Rule the parts" he observed in answering that timely question then current in Bay circles concerning the church as composed of its parts. "Thus it is with a Synod, they [the ministers] are either the Elders of the several Churches, if the Country be not too Numerous, or such as are chosen by the Elders, if the Country be large or numerous, and these are a legal representation of the Churches; the Elders of the Churches are chosen to that Office, to be rulers of the several Churches, and in case there be need, They have Power to select out of themselves, such a Company as may conveniently meet, with whom their Power shall be entrusted."[20]

Though Stoddard went beyond the arguments of Eliot's Christian Commonwealth, a second utopian scheme intended to provide the rationale for a more biblical organization of English and New England Puritan governments, Stoddard drew upon the general biblical idea of a supreme council composed of seventy-two persons and more generally upon the Old Testament example of eldership which had reinforced the tradition of the Reverend Elders. Moreover, he argued, "The appointment of Christ, that Teaching and Ruling Elders should Govern the Church, shews the Power of Synods;

these are appointed by Christ to be Rulers of the Church." "A Minister by Virtue of his Ministerial function, hath Power in Conjunction with others, to Govern the National or Provincial Church." Because a teaching elder is elected by a particular church, his authority as an elder is restricted to one church. "But every Man that is Pastor of a particular Church stands in a more General relation as a Minister of Christ, some that are not Pastors to particular congregations are yet Ministers of Christ; and every man that is a Pastour to a particular Church is a Minister of Christ and by Virtue of that Relation he may do acts of Office to the Members of other Churches occasionally Assembling with his own." Arguing from precedents set in the Old Testament, Stoddard concluded that "The Levites were the Ministers of God before they had Relation to any particular Synagogue."[21]

If Stoddard's arguments sounded familiar it was because they represented the criticisms of English Presbyterians and New Englanders who hoped to find some way out of a church system which theoretically tied the hands of a collective clergy. As a whole the Doctrine of Instituted Churches was a plea for a solidification of the New England Way into a national church, independent of the state. Likewise it represented the culmination of a trend among many of the clergy for a national, confederated church which was being thwarted and which had been thwarted in the past by lay "independency." Finally, Stoddard's work was meant as the rationale upon which he and his fellow ministers in the Connecticut Valley, cut off from active communication with the eastern clergy, built the Hampshire Association of ministers, an association which brought the aggressive authority of a de facto classis to the Valley and made the Northampton minister chief elder of the group. Whether or not Stoddard's influence helped precipitate and subsequently mold the character of the Saybrook Platform as at least one historian has claimed, several ministerial associations down-river in Connecticut were organized by the Platform into virtual presbyteries and their churches formed into several consociations with the requisite judicial instruments necessary to censure recalcitrants and "heretics."[22] The origins of these associations are yet unexplored, but it would appear that divisions among the churches in the 1670's prompted ministers such as John Woodbridge, Baxter's Presbyterian correspondent, and later his son Timothy, to push for consociation as a counterweight to the "morellian democracy" which he believed detrimental to the churches. The younger Woodbridge, for example, was chosen one of the "scribes" during the Saybrook Synod and represented the "council of New London County." Perhaps in the name of the organization -- namely a "council" -- one can see the schemes of old John Eliot coming to fruition in a provincial assembly of local councils.[23] Backed by the Connecticut magistracy, the instruments of the Saybrook Platform imposed a procedural orthodoxy on that colony which made church government in Connecticut as close to a de facto Presbyterianism as New England was to come.

While western Massachusetts and Connecticut were organizing against "declension" by the device of rigid consociation, eastern Massachusetts, the old geographic center of the waning "Reverend Elders" was experiencing a rejuvenation of ministerial meetings. The Cambridge Association, formally organized in 1690 after the example of ministerial associations brought by Charles Morton from England, was essentially a reorganization of the ministerial meetings of the Bay clergy, those ministers living in and about Boston and along and a short ways inland from the shores of Massachusetts Bay. Having mentioned ministerial meetings among the early ministers, Cotton Mather observed in his Magnalia that "these meetings are maintained unto this day."[24] If the elders continued to meet in Boston, ministers in other sections of the area responded much like their western and Connecticut counterparts to the uncertainties of the 1670's. The Indian massacres shook the clergy out of their provincialism and they responded, much as the Reverend Elders had responded to the unsettling religious situation in the infant colony, by meeting to discuss ways and means of implementing reformation in the churches. Discounting the prejudicial tone and the few inaccuracies to be found in John Wise's remarks, his account of the associations' formation gives some idea of the impetus for ministerial association in late seventeenth century Massachusetts:

> About thirty years ago, more or less [ca. 1670-1675], there was no appearance of the associations of pastors in these colonies, and in some

> parts and places there is none yet. But after the country had suffered much in the slaughters and depredations committed by the heathen, and by many other afflictions, the neighboring ministers, in some counties, met to pray together, etc., and for no other intent, that I ever knew or heard of. But after they had continued these meetings for some years, and others following the example began to converse together, and communicate cases, as best suited each person; and at last, perceiving they were almost gotten into a classical form before they thought of it, they began to give these meetings the specious titles of classes, associations, and ecclesiastical conventions, etc., as securely as though these titles were a fruit growing out of our own constitution, and by degrees began to dream that they were really, and de jure, what their new titles and late custom had made them only de facto; and time increased their inclinations and purposes to compass a more formal and complete settlement.[25]

Such were the meetings which Cotton Mather noted when he observed that "It has been the care of the ministers, in the several vincinages throughout the most part of the countrey, to establish such constant meetings, whereat they have informed one another of their various exercises, and assisted one another in the work of our lord: besides a general appearance of all the ministers in each colony, once a year, at the town, and the time of the General Court for elections of magistrates in the colonies. These meetings have not all obliged themselves to one method of proceedings, in pursuing of mutual edification; some do still fast and pray together, and speak in their turn to a proposed subject, much after the manner of the great Grindal's lectures."[26]

Communication among these groups led, in a general meeting of 1700, to a re-assertion of the ideals of consociation. The gathered ministers passed a resolution asking that "the Results of the Synod, in 1662, relating to the Consociation of Churches may be Republished with an Address to the Churches, Intimating our desires (and so far as we are Concerned our purposes) to see that Advice carefully attended, and the irregular Proceedings of any People hereafter contrary to that Advice, not Encouraged." The last reference indicated the general clergy's opposition to the recently formed, open-covenant, Brattle Street Church of which the Mathers were bitter foes.[27]

Interestingly enough the short reference to consociation in the Synod of 1662, Mather's brief remarks concerning ministerial meetings in early New England, and a few brief remarks touching Cotton's The Keyes in the Magnalia are about all that remained of the earlier tradition of ministerial association. These few remains of the Reverend Elders' tradition among ministers who had continued ministerial meetings in Boston amounted to an almost total blackout of the earlier tradition. It is astonishing that Cotton and Increase Mather failed to take advantage of those obvious references to "classes" in the manuscripts of Richard Mather. No doubt it was the precipitous decline of the Reverend Elders after 1670 and their internal divisions which amounted for a time to the complete rejection of Richard Mather by his sons Eleazer, Samuel, and Increase. Subsequent historians have failed to improve upon the enticing hints of this tradition found in the Magnalia. Manuscript material being largely ignored, the Cambridge Platform -- considered a definitive rather than a compromise statement on Congregational

Congregational polity -- became the sole document used to examine the nature of early Bay Congregationalism. Nowhere is this approach more apparent than in Mather's magnum opus. It was from neither grandfathers Cotton nor Mather but from John Eliot that Cotton Mather probably drew much of his inspiration for his consociational formulations. Having reviewed Eliot's Communion of Churches for his readers, Mather observed: "Such as these were the sentiments of our Eliot; and his deserved reputation in the churches of New-England, is that which has caused me to forsee some advantage and benefit arising unto the concerns of the gospel, by so large a recitation as I have now made thereof."[28]

Though owing little real inspiration to "the Reverend Elders", ministerial associations in the late seventeenth century arose, like the earlier association, out of a need to deal with pressing problems in the churches. Occasionally the sage advice of the first generation penetrated the veil which all but obliterated the earlier tradition of collective clerical responsibility. Referring to the formal reorganization of the Cambridge association, Mather turned for support to "the advice of Mr. Hooker: 'We must agree upon constant meetings of ministers, and settle the consociation of churches, or else we are undone.'"[29] The Cambridge Association met every six weeks on a Monday morning at Harvard College. Having opened a meeting with prayer, the group of ministers proceeded to business, establishing ad hoc meetings when emergencies arose in the churches, debating "any matter referring to ourselves," considering "any cases that shall be proposed unto us, from any other associations or persons," discoursing "upon any question proposed at the former meeting."[30] Among his reasons given for such an association, Mather assigned a pre-eminent position to the accommodation of Presbyterian ministers in the colony, referring them and the Congregational ministers to the "Heads of Agreement," a document recently negotiated by Increase Mather, which had smoothed the way for the union of Presbyterian and Congregational ministers in England.[31] Here, too, can be seen a general if vague continuation of the Reverend Elders' tradition, for Mather, like Eliot, John Norton, and even John Cotton, had tried to bring ministerial association in New England into a closer relationship with the Presbyterian polity.

The consociational plans of the Mathers were consummated -- at least on paper -- when the Ministerial Convention of 1704 endorsed a scheme for a federation of their associations. The Boston, Weymouth, Salem, Sherborne, and Bristol associations met at Boston in September of 1705 and drew up "The Proposals of 1705" which were intended to complete the federation with a standing council. The association hoped to impose a degree of orthodoxy upon the churches of the associated pastors by making churches and individual ministers accountable to the association. Where there was a dispute likely to foster "imbroilments" in the congregation the minister was to seek the advice of his colleagues before he proceeded "to any action" in the congregation.[32] In their efforts to prevent the ordination of undesirables, the clergy insisted that churches with vacant pulputs should request the associated pastors to find a replacement while the candidates, for their part, were expected to undergo "a due Tryal by some one or other of the Associations, concerning their Qualifications for the Evangelical Ministry."[33] The standing council was to consist of these combined associations together with a suitable number of laymen-delegates which "shall Consult, Advise and Determine all Affairs that shall be proper matter for the Consideration of an Ecclesiastical Council."[34] Delegates were to be elected yearly and were expected to attend the regular sessions of the council and any extraordinary session called in an emergency. Understandably, the administrative machinery and executive functions of the consociated churches were undertaken by the ministerial associations. The sanctions of the council were essentially those traditionally proposed as appropriate to a community of churches -- ostracism from the community. While refusing communion with a church would not affect the internal affairs of the congregation, the stigma of ostracism and the occasional aids which an association or council could give to a distressed congregation would, it was assumed, serve as sufficient sanctions and encouragements and thereby make consociation operable.

Opponents of the associationists made much of the nonscriptural origins of the associations. Samuel Mather rankled brother Increase by noting that "there is no warrant from the word of God, for the Ministers of this country to forme themselves in Associations and of those associated pastors with Delegates sent from Churches be formed into a standing council.... We conclude it from their not citing one Text of Scripture to prove what they have done." "Surely being all Ministers and Studiants in the Scripture," Mather taunted, "had ther been but one Scripture in the whole Bible for the proof of it they would have found it, cited it, hence seing such men as these have cited no Scripture for what they have done, we may fairly conclude there is none for it."[35]

Though associations may have been nonscriptural and but superficially related to the tradition of "the elders," the Bay area ministers yet maintained that sense of _noblesse noblige_ which had motivated their fathers and grandfathers. While their categories of analysis were different, the associationists' concern for unity in the community of churches and their sense of leadership remained the same. The later generation worried over the same problems attendant upon the administration of a collection of churches and sought to fulfill the same executive, administrative, and deliberative functions of consociation as had the Reverend Elders.

Continuity with the past was expressed in a more significant though less conscious way. If the Bay elders organized themselves upon a voluntary basis and presumed to rule by the consent of the governed while invoking the power of the magistracy, the later associationists were left to their own devices. Generally unsupported by the state and therefore willingly or involuntarily forced to rely solely on voluntaryism, they purified voluntaryism by relying upon the power of persuasion and the voluntary association to achieve the unity and verity which previous generations would have obtained by recourse to the state. The spontaneous generation of ministerial associations after 1675, like the origins of the Reverend Elders and the associations upon which the English Classis Movement was based, indicates the social sources of associationalism indigenous to English speaking Puritans. The English generation of classicists chose a Presbyterian vehicle for its expression; the second or early Bay generation of ministers sought a Congregational alternative. By 1700 and general religious toleration, Congregationalism was left to its own devices and associationalism reached its purest form and highest degree of rationalization in the works and institutions of this latter generation of ministers. The very important role which the voluntary association was to play in the organization of American religious denominations and in the formation of those satellite societies which served the cause of evangelical American protestantism with tract and ax in the nineteenth century were anticipated, it can be suggested, in the schemes of the later Mathers. For all of their differences and the provincialism displayed by the average congregation, the congregational churches did have much in common as they were to find out during the eighteenth century. As coercive authority declined, the common background of the churches -- those cultural determinants such as language, an ethnic identity, common traditions -- served as the cement of voluntaryism providing not only the necessary familiarity of men who would join together but providing also the goals and aspirations which they sought to serve in their combination. Just as American denominations were to serve the disinherited, the ethnic group, and sectionalism, so the voluntary associations promoted by the Mathers had their "social sources" (to borrow H. Richard Niebuhr's excellent phrase) in the community of interests which the Bay clergy had sought to combine in some form or another for three generations.

This tendency to combine and rule was offset in all three generations by the claims of the individual congregation. While ministerial associations flourished at the turn of the century the ministers were unable to achieve their ultimate objective -- institution of the standing council.[36] They were thwarted largely through the efforts of one minister, the reverend John Wise, pastor of the Chebacco parish in Ipswich. Though certainly a foe of centralized ecclesiastical authority and the champion of congregational integrity, Wise was not so much the enemy of consociation as a thinker who recognized that in a voluntary association the interests of the whole can only be served when the congregations themselves are strong, active, and willing to participate in the community of churches. Like those other second and third generation ministers who remained outside of the association, Wise was a clergyman who failed to sympathize with the first generation's concern for the churches as a homogeneous group with similar covenants, officers, and theological beliefs.

Wise's concern for the congregation was magnified by an overweening fear of centralized authority first developed when he, together with other inhabitants of Ipswich, were jailed during the regime of Sir Edmund Andros for opposing a tax laid upon the colonies without the consent of the towns. His particularism was given its political content in that crucible of dissent -- the colonial rebellion in New England against the agents of James II which coincided with England's Glorious Revolution. The consociational schemes of the Mathers became a new form of enforced centralization in his mind. As he had defended the right of the town to consent to taxation, so he opted for the liberties of the congregation. If Wise was habitually drawn into the service of parishes (a congregation serving a particular area of a town) formed when inhabitants of established communities separated themselves from their community's congregation, he seems to have profited by the experience and developed into a dedicated congregational minister interested in regenerating the spiritual life of new flocks. And if, as a product of the 1670's, Wise inherited a distaste for "prelacy" and allowed geographic decentralization to affect his view of the larger world around him, the Chebacco minister developed a deep appreciation for the meaning of Congregationalism as applied to the individual congregation, an appreciation no doubt the result of the spirit of reform and renewal with which the Reforming Synod of 1679-1680 had tried to infect the churches.

The political and "democratic" character of Wise's works have obscured the fact that Wise was, through his works, proposing an exciting redefinition of the congregation. If a critic of autocracy, he was also an articulate exponent of "independency" and a reformer of congregations gone to seed in the lax half of the seventeenth century. Wise celebrated the virtues of the congregation. In his *The Churches Quarrel Espoused* (Boston, 1713), for example, the Chebacco pastor addressed the laymen rather than the clergy, exhorting them to place due value upon themselves and their churches. "Imagine your selves to be something more than Ordinary," he observed in his "Epistle Dedicatory," "for really you be so."[37] And in that self-esteem one should find a new appreciation of the congregation and the church's liberties, he asserted, a pride in congregational institutions and liberties like that which the English have in their civil liberties. Pride and self-esteem should motivate decayed congregations to reassert these liberties by consciously reforming the church. The churches should once again elect ruling elders and develop an appreciation for church discipline as outlined in the Cambridge Platform, a document so little known in the late seventeenth century that Wise believed it to be in the possession of no more than one in a thousand inhabitants of Massachusetts Bay.[38]

Wise, the theoretician of Independency put forward his ideas in his *Vindication of the Government of New-England Churches* (Boston, 1717). Though he was working within the tradition of the church covenant, Wise's mentor was not Ames but Samuel Puffendorf, one of several natural law theorists who saw social groupings and political obligations as arising from the covenant or contract.[39] Wise believed that man was a rational and social creature whose natural liberties prevented governments from tyranically usurping his natural birthright. Arguing from the "light of Nature" and it might be added, almost literally paraphrasing Puffendorf, Wise insisted that man was motivated by self-love, self-preservation, a sociable disposition, and an "affection or Love to Mankind." In addition to being sociable, Wise insisted, man had by nature "an Original Liberty Instampt upon his Rational Nature." And in nature one man was the equal of other men. The very name "man" carried in it an uncommon dignity. "I am not a Beast or a Dog" he was fond of observing, "but am a Man as well as your self, Since then Humane Nature agrees equally with all persons; and since no one can live a Sociable Life with another that does not own or Respect him as a Man; it follows as a Command of the Law of Nature, that every Man Esteem and treat another as one who is naturally his Equal, or who is a Man as well as he."[40]

This celebration of human dignity was, of course, in keeping with the village democrat's appreciation of men in the congregation as something "more than Ordinary." It was basically in this context that Wise viewed the covenanted congregation rather than from an Amesian perspective. While he was quick to quote the Cambridge Platform to the effect that "A Congregational Church, is by the Institution of Christ, a part of the Militant Church, Consisting of a Company of Saints by Calling," the Chebacco pastor was primarily interested in the organizational value of the covenant and the rights inherent in a covenanted relationship. And while his argument in this respect was reminiscent of the early ministers, his application was that of the natural law thinkers and their view of the covenant. Thus a "Particular Church" is "a Society of Christians, meeting together in one Place, under their proper Pastors, for the performance of Religious Worship, and the Exercising of Christian Discipline." "We are a Body united in the Conscience of Religion, or for the Consciencious Observation of the Duties of Religion; by an Agreement in Discipline, and in a Covenant of Hope."[41] To relate the particular church to the natural law thinkers Wise argued by analogy to the political thought of his period. Though moral, natural men found it necessary to form a government by compact, creating a moral person of the civil state. Of those classical forms of government which enlightened minds found in the works of the ancient political thinkers, only democracy, Wise insisted, was a proper form of government "which the Light of Nature does highly value, and often directs to as most agreeable to the Just and Natural Prerogatives of Human Beings." Having established this premise, Wise arrived at a conclusion which was self-evident for anyone who knew his ultimate objective. "In a word" he insisted, "an Aristocracy is a dangerous Constitution in the Church of Christ, as it possesses the Presbytery of all Church Power." It followed "that the People or Fraternity under the Gospel, are the first Subject of Power; or else Religion sinks the dignity of Humane Nature into a baser Capacity with relation to Ecclesiastical, then it is in, in a Natural State of being with relation to civil Government.... That a Democracy in Church or State, is a very honourable and regular Government according to the Dictates of Right Reason."[42]

Quite obviously right reason meant that neither classes nor synods exercised an original jurisdiction over a congregation. Ecclesiastical authority resided in the congregation (whose authority was superior to that of its officers); it alone could choose its officers and censure its members. Consequently, "a council has only Consultative, not a Juridicial Power in it." Moreover, "all Members of an Ecclesiastical Council, deriving from a Democracy, are Subject of equal Power. Whatever the Power is, the several Delegates must from the nature of the Government they derive from, be equal sharers in it." Any superstructure beyond councils which would be imposed upon the churches would be top-heavy and prone to corruption. By contrast to England "There is no lurking place for Symony in this Constitution. There is no buying and selling of Offices, whereby the World has ben miserably cheated, and debauched. Here is no back Stairs for Cousins and Favourites to Climb up to high Seats without Desert; it is merit and **intrinsick** Worth sets the value, and holds the strongest plea for Preferment here [in New England] ."[43]

When the village democrat was able to contain his well-nourished rage, it is apparent why he placed so much emphasis upon the individual congregation. "Independency" he observed quoting Thomas Hooker, "signifies a sufficiency in its kind, for the attainment of its End. And in this sense, Independency is opposed to Imperfection: And if we take it thus, a Particular Church may be said to be Independent, it being sufficient to attain the end it was Instituted for; it having compleat power, when rightly Constituted, to Exercise all the Ordinances of God." Wise had sufficient concern for the "universal church" to believe that synods were necessary to support "Unity, Love, and Concord." Yet where the Mathers saw a need for a stronger consociational authority to reform the churches, Wise insisted upon the congregation, rightly constituted, as the best means of religious reformation. It was not enough to eradicate heresy and the other sins afflicting the churches by resorting to centralization. "I doe account indeed that the destruction of the Churches, in moral speaking, may be attributed immediately and nextly to other Causes, as Ignorance, Pride, Hypocrasy, etc." he observed in closing. "But remotely to the dissolution of the Order of them." Taking a favorite page from ancient history, the Chebacco pastor noted that declension in the ancient churches "followed the subversion of the Old Constitution." If true Christian principles were to be maintained in New England, it could only be done by adherence to Congregationalism manifest in scripture, expounded by the clergy in the Golden Age, and deduced by proofs positive from the laws of nature.[44]

By contrast to the Mathers and Stoddard, Wise's interests centered upon the fraternal character of congregationalism. All three divines were "Congregationalists" but of the three, Wise along asserted that "independency" which had so long plagued many of the clergy. By design or accident, Wise's analogy to political theory and to the political situation in old and New England identified independency with what the average colonist saw as the struggle against Stuart tyranny. And in resorting to the theory of natural rights vis a vis the church covenant and the congregation, Wise placed a lopsided emphasis upon those "independent" themes in the Congregational ideology which celebrated congregational rights and liberties. Thus Wise was a natural son of the independents who had stood opposed to the Cambridge Platform though, ironically, he had come to see in that document of moderate compromise the rationale for the independent's cause. Moreover, Wise was a product of that geographic decentralization which aided and abetted independency, a decentralization which Wise sought to ratify in opposition to the Mathers' associational schemes.

Solomon Stoddard was very much a child of his times also. If Wise spoke for independency and the fraternal dimension of the congregation, Stoddard was the heir apparent of the active consociationists among the early ministry, a lineal descendent who demonstrated the traits of authority-conscious parents who would join in the collective assertion of their prestige to promote unity and verity. That Stoddard considered himself a Congregationalist and not a Presbyterian suggests the common ancestry of both forms of polity in the Reformed tradition, a tradition sufficiently broad to provide Stoddard with room for his intellectual manuvers without causing him undue comfort as an innovator. If Wise's positions seems like that of old John Davenport in the 1660's, Stoddard can be compared to John Eliot, perhaps the most forceful of the conciationists and an original thinker who was willing to tamper with the church covenant so as to keep the heap and chaff in the same congregation. Moreover, Stoddard was in the best tradition of that spirit of innovation by which a majority of the clergy kept an open mind to the realities of religious life in the colony.

The Mathers meanwhile, represented the mainstream of Congregationalism in two important particulars. They stood opposed to a further relaxation of admission standards in the churches on the one hand, and maintained an abiding concern for the community of churches and its instruments of consociation. They, it can be suggested, stood halfway between Wise and Stoddard for they would maintain the essentially voluntaristic relationship in congregation and community which Wise sought but stood opposed to Wise in their effort at a more formal organization of the churches which approached but did not equal the rigorous associationalism of Stoddard and the Saybrook Platform.

The Mathers, Wise, and Stoddard were all Congregationalists by conviction and in their fidelity to the past. Yet personal and ideological differences, augmented respectively by what might be called a cosmopolitan, a village, and a frontier mentality, amounted to a fragmentation of the Congregational ideology into three distinctive faces. To be sure, there had always been differences (sometimes considerable differences) among the early Bay clergy when it came to seeking a balanced interpretation of church polity. Yet a comparison of the way in which those differences were held by a Wise and a Cotton Mather, and the way in which differences were adjusted between a John Cotton and his colleagues, indicates that the appearance of a fragmented ideology in the early eighteenth century was due, in some respects, to the disappearance of a cohesive ministerial community. That Mather, Wise, and Stoddard never had to confront each other in periodic meetings of their colleagues or consciously seek to accomodate differences and emphasize similarities, suggests that a conscious attempt to mold a common perspective had given way to a fragmented view of the church. The responsibility for that fragmentation does not, of course, rest with any members of this later generation. While the Mathers may have shouldered an unusual amount of guilt for declension, a breach in the ministerial community was not counted among those sins of omission and commission. All of the divines involved were good haters and excellent controversialists. In asserting the righteousness of their respective causes they simply helped a process by which the matrix of a common perspective, the early ministerial community, had been smashed on the anvil of tradition by the hammer of controversy.

Epilogue:
The Dilemma of the Christian Vigilante

By comparison with the consociated authority of a later generation, the structure of The Reverend Elders was irrational and informal while their authority was more nearly dependent upon a mystique. The later clergy, by contrast, turned increasingly to a rational and bureaucratic formalism to reassert the forces of religion in daily life. To be sure, a majority of the early ministers attempted to have their status conventus ratified by the Cambridge Synod. But the elder generation had merely sought formal recognition as a primary instrument of consociation while divines like the Mathers, Stoddard, and Wise became preoccupied with formal agencies of consociation precisely defined and with a more precise delineation of ecclesiastical authority. The Doctrine of the Instituted Churches resolved the ambiguous authority of "the elders" while "The Proposals of 1705" sought to define an instrument of consociation (in some detail) with clearly recognized sanctions and a formalized structure. Wise, meanwhile, attempted to create a countervailing rationale which would protect natural man from what he considered to be instruments of coercion and formalized authority.

Never even in their most self-assured moments did the elder generation approach so formal a definition of consociation and its authority. Such things as administrative formalities were simply not characteristic of "the elders" who were virtuosi at extemporizing ecclesiastical authority. Indeed, the very virtue of consociation in the elders' eyes was its noninstitutional and *ad hoc* character with the result that (to paraphrase John Higginson's remarks *apropos* the Hartford council in 1657) everyone talked about consociation but no one knew exactly what it was intended to accomplish or how it was to exist on so improvised a basis.

Consociated authority in the early colony was vigilante authority and "the elders" the chief vigilantes. New England was on the leading edge of a physical frontier where institutions were new and shallow-rooted and where ideas were in a state of ferment. Its inhabitants were, themselves, on the frontier of a religious age in the process of transition. Puritanism in England and New England was represented by no single configuration of ideals. It was a vibrant and fecund religious awakening in which pietists, mystics, Christian communists -- in short, men of all persuasions -- were dedicated to a redefinition of the English church. Their various schemes ranged from the ideal of a purified state church to the purified sect. Ernst Troeltsch, in assessing the currents and crosscurrents of European protestantism in the seventeenth century, recognized a "free church" movement of baptists, congregationalists, independents, and has suggested that adherents of the movement were faced with a basic question when the ideals of Calvinism were to be exerted as a purifying influence upon the sovereign state: "How could a 'holy community' [the church] composed of sterling Christians, whose faith was a matter of profound personal conviction, and whose lives were controlled by an exalted and austere ideal, be at the same time a Church which would provide a spiritual home for the masses of the population?"[1]

This study of "the Reverend Elders" has been an examination of one group of Calvinists and their attempt to answer this question. We have been concerned more with the attempts than with the answer (theoretical Congregationalism) for in terms of application to the religious situation in New England there was no answer to this classic dilemma of the Reformation. That dilemma is to be seen in the ambiguous nature of the elders' authority. As Calvinists the ministers were possessed by a schizophrenic attitude towards authority and the church. They wanted, at one and the same time, free churches and a homogeneous, purified society where "verity and unity" prevailed. If the New England Way did not correspond to an ideal Congregationalism neither did the authority of the elders approximate the ideal authority of congregational consociation. A voluntary association of pastors tried, in effect, to rule a state church. Troeltsch suggested that in America the advocates of free churches reverted to the "principle of Theocracy," that ideal of primitive Calvinism which "considered it the greatest crime to tolerate the existence of several churches alongside of each other" and which "believed that the absolute and unbroken nature of the idea of truth requires both the unity of civilization and the sole dominion of the Truth, coupled with intolerance towards untruth."[2] In New England neither a system of free churches nor a state church and theocracy prevailed because the interaction of ministers and churches as well as differences of opinion among the ministers created a mutation. If the elders believed in verity and unity and on occasion would exert their authority to that end, they also found it necessary to accommodate the opinions of one another, to define an ecclesiastical system which was noncreedal and to balance what in their minds were the legitimate claims of the congregation against the claims of a community of churches and the state.

Despite the fact that the Bay's free churches were closed to the nonelect by the church covenant, the ministers had to face other considerations which diluted the ideal of a voluntary congregation of the faithful. They discovered quite early that faith was a divisive force in the churches and not subject to simple definition. Having dichotomized faith into internals and externals, the clergy further tended to compromise the ideal of the covenanted congregation with the half-way covenant in an earnest attempt to prevent the second generation from sinking into religious barbarism. Indeed, such debates as those which were conducted in an effort to define faith under the church covenant and the half-way covenant indicated that within the ministerial community there was a breadth of opinion ranging from presbyterianism to the sectarian mentality of the aged John

Davenport. If there was tension between the covenant of Grace and the church covenant, the church covenant and the "national covenant" were not easily reconciled. If New Englanders believed themselves to be an entire community in covenant with God, concern for the covenanted congregation could lead to a disregard for an entire nation covenanted with God. Solomon Stoddard recognized this fact and acted accordingly, for he believed the sanctity of a civilization was more important than that of the covenanted congregation.

Such were the dilemma and the alternatives with which a vigilant clergy wrestled. That we conclude this study of The Reverend Elders on a note of irresolution is only because the dilemmas of an age are frequently among its most distinctive characteristics. If the elders were dedicated to a purification of the English church, their cultural heritage was not so unambiguous as to banish decision making from their purified culture. Thus politics, or the art of defining and applying the possible, was a way of life for a collective ministry dedicated to institutionalizing faith and fellowship in New England. Politics was the reason for the elders' very existence and, of course, for their eventual ruin.

NOTES

Prologue

1. *The Apologia of Robert Keayne*. "The Last Will and Testament of Me, Robert Keayne, All of it Written With my Own Hands and Bagan by Me, Mo: 6: I: 1653, Commonly Called August", Bernard Bailyn, editor, (New York, 1965), 9-10.

2. *Ibid*., 10

3. William Hubbard, *A General History of New England from the Discovery MDCLXXX*, (Cambridge, 1815), 117, 118.

4. For the standard work on the relationship between English and New England Congregationalists see Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630-1650* (Boston, 1959).

Chapter I

1. William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism or, The Way to the New Jerusalem as Set Forth in Pulpit and Press from Thomas Cartwright to John Lilburne and John Milton, 1570-1643*, (New York, 1957), 65-66, 69; John Norton, *Able Being Dead yet Speaketh* (London, 1658), 13-14; "Thomas Shepard's Memoir of Himself", *Chronicles of the First Planters of The Colony of Massachusetts Bay, From 1623 to 1636*, Alexander Young, ed., (Boston, 1846), 506; Benjamin Brook, *The Lives of the Puritans: Containing a Biographical Account of Those Divines Who Distinguished Themselves in the Cause of Religious Liberty, From the Reformation Under Queen Elizabeth, to the Act of Uniformity in 1662* (London, 1813), iii, 182, i, 305-06; Haller, 65.

2. Daniel Neal, *History of the Puritans or Protestant Non-Conformists, From the Death of Queen Elizabeth to the Beginning of the Civil War* (London, 1733), ii, 264; Samuel Whiting, "Concerning the Life of the Famous Mr. Cotton, Teacher to the Church of Christ at Boston, in New-England", *Chronicles of the First Planters...*, Young, ed., 427-428; William Bourne, et. al., to John Cotton , n.d. but ca. summer, 1637, MSS Cotton Papers, II, 9, Boston Public Library.

3. Brooks, *The Lives of the Puritans*, ii, 44.

4. *Ibid*., ii, 382.

5. Brooks, *Lives of the Puritans*, ii, 268; Haller, *Rise of Puritanism*, 55.

6. Whiting, rector of Skirbeck parish, related details of Cotton's English career in his memoir "Concerning the Life of the Famous Mr. Cotton," *Chronicles of the First Planters*, 419-431. Concerning Skelton's relationship to Cotton see John Cotton to Samuel Skelton, October 2, 1630, Thaddeus Mason Harris, *Memorials of the First Church in Dorchester* (Boston, 1830), 53-57.

7. Williston Walker in "Richard Mather", *Ten New England Leaders* (New York, 1901), refers to Mather's "former ministerial associates", 115.

8. Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*; or *The Ecclesiastical History of New-England; From its First Planting, in the Year 1620 Unto the Year of our Lord 1698* (Hartford, 1852), I, 336; Brooks, *Lives of the Puritans*, iii, 65; *Dictionary of National Biography*, XXVII, 29; Samuel Collins, vicar of Braintree, quoted in Clinton Rossiter, *Six Characters in Search of a Republic*. *Studies in the Political Thought of the American Colonies* (New York, 1964), 5; Thomas Shepard's Memoir, *Chronicles of the First Planters*, 511ff; Mather, *Magnalia*, I, 335.

9. Raymond P. Stearns, *The Strenuous Puritan, Hugh Peter, 1598-1660* (Urbana, 1954), 46ff, 28-29; Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts*, 120.

10. James L. Ainslie, *The Doctrines of Ministerial Order in the Reformed Churches of the 16th and 17th Centuries* (Edinburgh, 1940), 187.

11. Documents pertinent to the classis movement are to be found in *The Presbyterian Movement in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth as Illustrated By the Minute Book of the Dedham Classis, 1582-1589*, edited with an introduction by Roland G. Usher, (London, 1905). All four men appear in the volume's "A List of Puritan Ministers Concerned in the Classical Movement," xxxvff.

12. Marshall Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism, A Chapter in the History of Idealism* (Chicago, 1965), 225. Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Church* (New York, 1960), II, 678-679, sees the prophesyings as a primary example of the religious awakening taking place in the English church during the early Stuart era.

13. For a definition of Presbyterian as understood in Elizabethan England see Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism*, 490; See *The Presbyterian Movement in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth as Illustrated*

By *The Minute Book of the Dedham Classis 1582-1589*, Roland G. Usher, editor, "Introduction", xvii ff for a description of the 'Book of Discipline' and its scheme of government; for an assessment of the Classis movement which minimizes its presbyterian origins and emphasizes its associational qualities see William A. Shaw, "Elizabethan Presbyterianism," *English Historical Review*, III (1888), 655-667; Cartwright's quotation is taken from his "Second Admonition to Parliament," *Puritan Manifestoes, A Study of the Origins of the Puritan Revolt*, W. H. Frere and C. E. Douglas, editors, xxviii.

14. Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (Boston, 1960), 21-22.

15. Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae* ... (London, 1796), Part I, 15-16, Part II, 148-150.

16. *Ibid.*, Part II, 140, 148; for a detailed study of ministerial associations and Presbyterian classes established during the Commonwealth period see William A. Shaw, *A History of the English Church During the Civil Wars and Under the Commonwealth, 1640-1660* (New York, 1900), Volume II; a recent assessment of this period is to be found in J. H. Hexter, "The Problem of the Presbyterian Independents," *Reappraisals in History. New Views on History and Society in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 1961), 163-184.

17. Ainslie, 62-90, treats "The Powers of the Reformed Ministerial Order" in some detail.

18. H. C. Porter, *Reformation and Reaction in Tudor Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1958), 216.

19. Porter, *Reformation and Reaction*, "The Theology of William Perkins", Ch. XII; William Perkins, *Works*, I (1616), 361, as quoted in Porter, 220.

20. Haller, *Rise of Puritanism*, 90, notes these stages as part of the brotherhood's general schema.

21. *Ibid.*, 90ff; Porter, *Reformation and Reaction*, 331-336, Chapter XV, "The Question of Christian Assurance: William Barrett", 344ff.

22. McNeil, *Cure of Souls*, 230.

23. See "The Diary of Richard Rogers" and "The Diary of Samuel Ward" in *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries*, Marshal M. Knappen, ed., (Chicago, 1933); Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae: or, Mr. Richard Baxter's Narrative of the Most Memorable Passages of his Life and Times* (London, 1696), 7; Winthrop S. Hudson, "The Ministry in the Puritan Age", *The Ministry*

in Historical Perspective, H. Richard Niebuhr and Daniel D. Williams, eds., (New York, 1956), 196-99.

24. Ezekiel Rogers to Lady Johan Barrington, February 2, 1629/30, transcribed from Egerton MSS, 2546, folio 142, deposited in the Essex Institute, Salem Massachusetts.

25. Geoffrey F. Nuttall, The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience (Oxford, 1946), 6-8.

26. Ibid., 23.

27. Ibid., 21-24, 75, 141ff.

28. The Preston and Sibbes quotations are taken from Ibid., 36, 39.

29. Whiting, Life of John Cotton, Chronicles of the First Planters, 424-5; Mather, Magnalia, I, 257; John Cotton, Gods Mercie Mixed with his Justice or His Peoples Deliverance in Times of Danger, Everett H. Emerson, ed., (Gainesville, 1958), 5, 120.

30. A relation of Winthrop's early religious experiences is to be found in the Winthrop Papers, Stewart Mitchell, ed., (Boston, 1943), III, 339-340.

31. Knappen, "The Diary of Samuel Ward", Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries, 99; "The Puritan Character as Seen in the Diaries", Ibid., 15.

32. Baxter, Reliquiae Baxterianae, 607

33. McNeil, Cure of Souls, 216-217.

34. Knappen, Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries, 67-68, 8, 26.

35. McNeil, Cure of Souls, 231.

36. John Eliot to Richard Baxter, 7th of 8th, 1657, Some Unpublished Correspondence of the Reverend Richard Baxter and the Reverend John Eliot, The Apostle of the American Indians, 1656-1682, F. J. Powicke, ed., (Manchester, 1931), 24-5. Speaking of the Congregationalists who would emerge from this period and the period's emphasis upon fellowship and regeneration, Geoffrey F. Nuttall has observed: "It was not, then, their underlying purpose which distinguished them so much as the strictness with which in practice they interpreted the demand" for congregations composed of visible saints (Nuttall, Visible Saints The Congregational Way 1640-1660 [Oxford, 1957], 134). Thus Nuttall suggests that Congregationalism was part of a larger movement which included

for example, both Richard Rogers and Richard Baxter characterized by a concern for congregations with a "deeply serious piety" (*Ibid*.).

37. Larzer Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton, Puritanism and the American Experience* (Princeton, 1962), 49; John Cotton, *The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared* (London, 1648), 20; Cotton to Skelton, Harris, *Memorials*, 53-57. For an incomplete but informative history of the covenent idea and the covenant's various applications among dissenters see Champlin Burrage, *The Church Covenant Idea Its Origins and Its Development* (Philadelphia, 1904). Ironically divines like Davenport and Cotton were closer to the early English Baptists who, Burrage suggests, rejected the idea of formal covenants though they did make an equation between fellowship and implicit covenants (78).

38. John Davenport, manuscript treatise on the nature of the church, American Antiquarian Society, Chapters 3, 2, 5 (unpaginated).

39. Davenport, *Ibid*., Ch. 4 cites "Dr. Ames" in defense of his interpretation of the "visible church;" Cotton, *Way* ... *Cleared*, 20.

40. William Ames, *The Workes of the Reverend and Faithfull Minister of Christ William Ames, Marrow of Sacred Divinity* (volume I of *Works*, hereafter cited as *Marrow*) (London, 1643), 99, 101, 113, 114.

41. Quoted in John von Hohr, "Covenant and Assurance in Early English Puritanism," *Church History*, 34 (1965), 195.

42. Perry Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness*, "The Marrow of Puritan Divinity", 53; Ames, *Marrow*, 11, 114ff; von Huhr, 195-203.

43. Ames, *Marrow*, 135.

44. *Ibid*., 141, 139, 179. Ames' voluntaryism like his emphasis upon faith and its relation to fellowship proceeded from one basic assumption: faith is an act of will to union with Christ. Thus Ames rejected compulsion in religious matters (in favor of voluntary relations) since compulsion violated the Christian will (Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *Visible Saints The Congregational Way* 1640-1660 [Oxford, 1957], 106.)

45. Brooks, *Lives of the Puritans*, ii, 405.

46. See Raymond P. Stearns, *Congregationalism in the Dutch Netherlands The Rise and Fall of the English Congregational Classis 1621-1635* (Chicago, 1940). The English Classis observed

Geoffrey F. Nuttall in his Visible Saints The Congregational Way 1640-1660 (Oxford, 1957), 9, was not a "congregational" classis. Several of its members, notably Samuel Balmford and Thomas Barclay, would embrace Presbyterianism during the Commonwealth period. Moreover, Nuttall suggests that a close analysis of nonseparating Congregationalists so-called, especially the Ames, Parker. Baynes Bradshaw group, demonstrates that they possessed no "genuine coherence ... as in any real sense Congregational -- quite apart from the fact that at this date [ca. 1620's and early 1630's] the use of the term is an anachronism (9)."

47. "Boswell Papers," Massachusetts Historical Society, Proceedings, ser. 2, II, 42; Stearns, Congregationalism, 53.

48. Ibid., 66-67.

49. Griffin Higgs to Sir William Boswell, April 9/19, 1634, MHS, Proceedings, ser. 3, II, 223-4.

50. Champlin Burrage, The Early English Dissenters in the Light of Recent Research (1550-1641), (Cambridge, 1912), II, 271.

51. Stearns, Congregationalism, 71-72.

52. John Winthrop to Sir Simond D'Ewes, September 26, 1633, Winthrop Papers, III, 139.

53. Winthrop's Journal "History of New England," 1630-1649, James Kendall Hosmer, ed., (New York, 1909), I, 113.

54. Perry Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 79. For an assessment of the various minister's views see 107ff.

55. "Shepard's Memoir, Chronicles of the First Planters, 529-30.

Chapter II

1. Winthrop's Journal "History of New England," 1630-1649, James Kendall Hosmer, ed., (New York, 1909), I, 324.

2. Raymond P. Stearns, The Strenuous Puritan, Hugh Peter, 1598-1660 (Urbana, 1954), 46; Perry Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts 1630-1650 (Boston, 1959), 129, sees Peter's influence more simply in terms of a mature Congregational perspective.

3. John Endicott to William Bradford, May 11, 1629, "Governor Bradford's Letter Book," Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections, series 1, vol. III (1794), 66.

4. John Cotton, *The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared* (London, 1648), 16.

5. *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., (Boston, 1853-4), I, 37 (hereafter referred to as *RMB*); Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (Boston, 1960), 105.

6. Champlin Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters in the Light of Recent Research (1550-1641)*, (Cambridge, 1912), II, 157.

7. William Hubbard, *A General History of New England from the Discovery MDCLXXX* (Cambridge, 1815), 119; Charles Gott to William Bradford, July 30, 1629, "Governor Bradford's Letterbook," 67; Hubbard, *General History*, 117.

8. For an account of this event see John Cotton to Samuel Skelton, October 2, 1630, Thaddeus Mason Harris, *Memorials of the First Church in Dorchester* (Boston, 1830), 53-57.

9. Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts*, 125-6.

10. Cotton to Skelton, Harris, *Memorials*.

11. See William Ames, *Works*, I, *Marrow of Sacred Divinity* (London, 1643), 139. English Congregationalists were less willing than their New England brethren to abandon this Amesian view. Even English critics of the English Independents noticed a difference between them and Bay Congregationalists, Daniel Cawdrey observing, for example, in reference to Ames, that "'the Independents have left it upon Record, that a particular Church is a similar part of the Catholique' ... and by the Congregational men the importance of 'particular Churches' as 'parts of the universal as a Totum of Integrum' was generally agreed" (Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *Visible Saints The Congregational Way 1640-1660* [Oxford, 1957] , 69.).

12. William Bourne, et. al, to John Cotton , n.d. but ca. summer, 1637, MSS Cotton Papers, II, 9, Boston Public Library.

13. Simeon Ash and William Rathband, *A Letter of Many Ministers in Old England Requesting The judgement of their Reverend Brethren in New England concerning Nine Positions. Written Anno Dom. 1637. Together with their Answer thereunto returned. Anno 1639. And the Reply made unto the said Answer, and sent over unto them, Anno 1640* (London, 1643), 21.

14. Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 131.

15. For a discussion of the application of such ideas in the case of the Boston church see Darrett B. Rutman, *Winthrop's Boston*,

Portrait of A Puritan Town, 1630-1649 (Chapel Hill, 1965), 50. See below Chapter III, for the ministers' matured view of covenants.

16. Samuel Fuller and Edward Winslow to William Bradford, et. al., July 26, 1630, "Governor Bradford's Letter Book," 75.

17. *Winthrop's Journal*, I, 51-52.

18. Rutman, *Winthrop's Boston*, 55.

19. "Captain Roger Clap's Memoirs," *Chronicles of the First Planters of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, From 1623 to 1636*, Alexander Young, ed., (Boston, 1846), 347; Samuel Fuller to William Bradford, June 28, 1630, "Governor Bradford's Letter Book," 74.

20. Burrage, *Early English Dissenters*, II, 294; Rutman, *Winthrop's Boston*, 51; Hubbard, *General History*, 186; Fuller to Bradford, "Governor Bradford's Letter Book," 74.

21. Hubbard, *General History*, 181-82; Cotton, *Way of Congregational Churches Cleared*, 17.

22. *Winthrop's Journal*, I, 107.

23. John Cotton to ______, Dec. 3, 1634, in *Chronicles of the First Planters*, 441.

24. John Endicott to William Bradford, "Governor Bradford's Letter Book," 66.

25. Bradford quoted in Burrage, *Early English Dissenters*, I, 362.

26. "The Company's Humble Request," *Chronicles of the First Planters*, 297.

27. The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, II, 1-9, King James version.

28. Samuel Fuller to William Bradford, "Governor Bradford's Letter Book," 75; Cotton to Skelton, Harris *Memorials*, 53-57.

29. Samuel Fuller and Edward Winslow to Governor Bradford, et. al., "Governor Bradford's Letter Book," 75; Nathaniel Morton, *New England's Memorials* (Boston, 1826), 146.

30. *Winthrop's Journal*, I, 111.

31. *Ibid.*, I, 83; see also John Cotton et. al. to the Church at Dorchester, December 16, 1634, Increase Mather, *The First Principles of New England Concerning the Subject of Baptism and Communion of Churches* (Cambridge, 1675), 2-4.

32. Winthrop's Journal, I, 83, 92-3.

33. Hubbard, General History, 126; Winthrop's Journal, I, 66, 71-2, 83.

34. Cotton Mather, Magnalia Christi Americana (Hartford, 1853), I, 313; "Body of Liberties," Section 95.7, 95.21. The "Body of Liberties" is to be found in William H. Whitmore, A Bibliographic Sketch of the Laws of the Massachusetts Colony from 1630 to 1686 (Boston, 1890).

35. Mather, Magnalia, I, 313; Wintrhop's Journal, I, 145-8.

36. RMB, I, 142-43.

37. Mather, Magnalia, I, 532, 538.

38. Cotton, Way of Congregational Churches Cleared, 55; Winthrop's Journal, I, 113.

39. Ibid., 61-62.

40. Ibid., 149.

41. Perry Miller, Roger Williams, His Contribution to the American Tradition (New York, 1962), 47.

42. Winthrop's Journal, I, 155; see "The Church of Jesus Christ at Salem, to our dearly Beloved and esteeded in Jesus, the Elders of the Church of Christ at Boston," MSS Cotton Papers, II, 3, for a second letter dealing with the same subject.

43. Winthrop's Journal, I, 154, 149, 116-17.

44. Ibid., I, 157, 162.

45. Cotton, The Way of the Churches of Christ in New England; or The Way of Churches walking in Brotherly equalitie, or coordination without Subjection of one Church to another. Measured and examined by the Golden Reed of the Sanctuary. Containing a Full Declaration of the Church way in all Particulars (London, 1645), 103.

46. Roger Williams, The Bloudy Tenet of Persecution, Samuel L. Caldwell, ed., in Narragansett Club, Publications, ser. 1, III, 221.

47. John Cotton, The Bloudy Tenet, Washed, and Made White in the Bloud of the Lambe (London, 1647), 150.

48. Williams, Bloudy Tenet, 200.

49. *Ibid.*, 223-4.

50. *Ibid.*, 226.

51. A portion of the "Modell" is extant as an undated, untitled fragment in the American Antiquarian Society. Quotation taken from MSS, 8-9.

52. *Ibid.*, 9-10.

53. *Ibid.*, 11, 11-12.

54. *Ibid.*, 12.

55. Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 117-118, 110-11.

56. See a *Sermon Preached by the Reverend, Mr. John Cotton, Teacher of the First Church in Boston in New England. Delivered at Salem, 1636. To which is Prefixed, a Retraction of his former Opinion concerning Baptism, utter'd by him immediately Preceeding the Sermon here Emitted.* (Boston, 1713).

57. *RMB*, I, 168; *Winthrop's Journal*, I, 177.

Chapter III

1. William Ames, *Works* (I), *Marrow of Sacred Divinity* (London, 1643), 134-5, 139-41.

2. Karl Reuter, "William Ames: The Leading Theologian in the Awakening of Reformed Pietism," Douglas Horton, trans., *William Ames* (Cambridge, 1965), 214-219 discusses this attitude insofar as it make Ames' thought unique and provocative for his followers.

3. *Winthrop's Journal "History of New England," 1630-1649*, James Kendall Hosmer, ed., (New York, 1909), I, 173-4. For an excellent study of the New England churches and the ideal of visible sainthood see Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints. The History of An Idea* (New York, 1963).

4. *Ibid.*, 177.

5. Thomas Shepard to Richard Mather, April 2, 1636, in *Memoirs of Thomas Shepard* (Boston, 1832), 88-91. The original is in the Massachusetts Historical Society, "Manuscripts -- 61.6, #1."

6. In addition to a letter of reply, Mather jotted a few remarks on a separate sheet of paper which he may or may not

have sent in reply to the Shepard letter of April 2, 1636 (see preceding page). These remarks are included with the Mather reply in the Massachusetts Historical Society's Bound Manuscripts.

7. John Cotton, *Sermon Preached by the Reverend Mr. John Cotton, Teacher of the First Church in Boston in New England. Delivered at Salem 1636. To which is Prefixed a Retraction of his former Opinion concerning Baptism, utter'd by him immediately Preceeding the Sermon here Emitted* (Boston, 1713), 1-5.

8. *Ibid*., 28, 23-4, 24.

9. John Cotton to Samuel Stone, March 27, 1638 , MSS Cotton Papers, II, 12, Boston Public Library; Cotton to Thomas Shepard, ca. April 1636, MSS Cotton Papers, II, 6.

10. *Ibid*.

11. John Cotton, treatise on faith, n.d., ca. late 1636, MSS Cotton Papers, II, 6.

12. John Cotton to Beloved Brother, June 4, 1638, MSS Cotton Papers, II, 13.

13. *Winthrop's Journal*, I, 196-7.

14. *Winthrop Papers*, Stewart Mitchell, ed., (Boston, 1943), III, 344.

15. *Winthrop's Journal*, I, 209-10; 230.

16. Emery Battis, *Saints and Sectaries, Anne Hutchinson and the Antinomian Controversy in the Massachusetts Bay Colony* (Chapel Hill, 1962), 262; Samuel Whiting to John Cotton, ca. 1638, MSS Cotton Papers, II, 24.

17. Thomas Shepard to John Cotton, ca. April, 1636, MSS Cotton Papers, II, 4.

18. This and the following excerpts are from an unpaginated, manuscript fragment of a larger diary kept by Thomas Shepard covering the period from December of 1641 to March of 1642, deposited in the Massachusetts Historical Society.

19. Thomas Shepard, *The Sincere Convert, Discovering the Paucity of True Beleevers; And the great difficulty of saving conversion* (London, 1641), 40, 258.

20. Larzer Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton, Puritanism and the American Experience* (Princeton, 1962), 113.

21. Untitled sermon, September 16, 1636, Massachusetts Historical Society, Miscellaneous Bound Manuscripts, I.

22. Richard Mather, sermon on labor, n.d., Chamberline Collection, CH. 2.52, Boston Public Library.

23. "Declaration of Ministers of Massachusetts," Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*. ser. 5, I (1871), 490-91.

24. Ralph Leveritch to ________ Hinckley, February 22, 1645/46, Massachusetts Historical Society, Unbound Manuscripts, box #1; "Some Few Questions and Answers together with theyre Explynation, taken out of Mr. Stones Cathechism," MSS Mather Papers, I, 30, Boston Public Library.

25. George Phillips, MS "Notebook of Greek, Latin and English Memoranda," Massachusetts Historical Society.

26. Perry Miller, "Thomas Hooker and the Democracy of Connecticut," *Errand Into the Wilderness* (New York, 1964), 32.

27. Robert Stansby to John Wilson, April 17, 1637, *Winthrop Papers*, III, 390; "3 propositions Which have devided Mr. Hooker and Mr. Cotton, in New England," [endorsed in England as received] , October 7, 1637, Public Record Office [Great Britain], *Colonial Records*, Class 1. vol. 9, p. 159.

28. *Winthrop's Journal*, I, 209.

29. [Thomas Welde] , *A Short Story of the Rise Reign, and Ruine of the Antinomians, Familists and Libertines, That Infected the Churches of New England* ... (London, 1644), 1-19, contains a full list of "errors" found among laymen in the churches.

30. *Winthrop's Journal*, I, 256-7; *Rise Reign and Ruin*, 9; Edward Johnson, *Wonder-Working Providence of Sions Saviour in New England,* J. Franklin Jameson, ed., (New York, 1946), 125-6.

31. *Winthrop's Journal*, I, 204-5.

32. *Severall Questions of Serious and necessary Consequence, Propounded by the Teaching Elders, Unto M. John Cotton of Boston in New-England with His respective Answer to each Question* (London, 1647), Cotton Preface. This printed list of queries and answers was but part of a larger manuscript of the debate preserved in the Massachusetts Historical Society. Cotton's preface preceeds a printed copy of questions and answers corrected by himself to which is appended "The Elders Reply", "Mr. Cottons Rejoynder" and "Mr. Cottons Revisall."

33. *Ibid.*, 98.

34. *Ibid.*, 108.

35. John Cotton to Peter Bulkley, April 6, 1637, MSS Hutchinson Papers, I (vol. 240 in the series), 41, Massachusetts Archives.

36. *Winthrop's Journal*, I, 217.

37. Cotton, *Way of Congregational Churches Cleared,* 40.

38. *Ibid.*, 47.

39. *Winthrop's Journal*, I, 233.

40. *Ibid.*, 235.

41. Cotton, *Way of Congregational Churches Cleared,* 54; John Cotton, *The Covenant of Grace: Discovering The Great Work of a Sinners Reconciliation to God* (London, 1655), 59.

42. Robert Keayne's manuscript notes on the sermons of John Cotton, 1639-1642, [18], Massachusetts Historical Society.

43. Bulkley to Cotton, December 17, 1640, MSS Cotton Papers, II, 23; same to same, January 4, 1640/41, *Ibid.*, III, 1a; Cotton to Bulkley, January 18, 1640/41, *Ibid.*, III, 1; same to same, August 6, 1641, *Ibid.*, III, 3; Bulkley to Cotton, February, 1641/42, *Ibid.*, III, 4; Cotton to Bulkley, February-March , 1641/42, *Ibid.*, III, 5; Cotton to Bulkley, ca. 1642, MSS Hutchinson Papers, I (240), 43.

44. John Allin and Thomas Shepard, *A Defence of the Answer unto the Nine Questions or Positions sent from New England Against the Reply Thereto by That Reverend servant of Christ, Mr. John Ball* (London, 1648), 29.

45. [Richard Mather], *Church-Government and Church-Covenant Discussed, In an Answer of the Elders of the severall Churches in New-England To two and thirty Questions, sent over to them by divers Ministers in England, to declare their judgments therein. Together with an Apologie of the said Elders in New-England for Church-Covenant, sent over in Answer to Master Bernard in the yeare 1639. As also in an Answer to Nine Positions about Church-Government* [by John Davenport] (London, 1643), 62, 64; Richard Mather and William Tompson, *A Modest and Brotherly Answer to Mr. Charles Herle his Book, against the Independency of Churches* ... (London, 1644), 9.

46. [Mather], *Church-Government*, 63-63, 64.

47. *The Record of Baptism, Marriages and Deaths and admissions to the church and dismassals therefrom, transcribed from the church records in the Town of Dedham, Massachusetts. 1638-1845* (Dedham, 1888), 10.

48. [Mather] , *Church-Government ... an Apologie ... in Answer to Master Bernard*, 2; James Truslow Adams, *The Founding of New England* (Boston, 1949), 122, estimates that of the 16,000 immigrants a substantial majority remained outside of the churches no doubt, in part, because of the growing sense of exclusivity implied by the entire idea of the covenant.

49. [Mather], *Church-Government ... an Apologie ... in Answer to Master Bernard*, 3-4, 22.

50. [Mather], *Church-Government ... an Answer of the Elders ... To two and thirty Questions*, 32.

51. "Conference of the Elders of Massachusetts With the Rev. Robert Lenthall, of Weymouth, Held at Dorchester, Feb. 10, 1639," *Congregational Quarterly*, XIX (1877), 236-239.

52. [Mather], *Church-Government ... an Apologie ... in Answer to Master Bernard*, 44. Prominent English Independents, notably John Goodwin and John Rogers, continued to regard covenants as had the Bay clergy prior to this time. Goodwin, for example, doubted their scriptural nature while Rogers found explicit covenants useful but not absolutely necessary. (Geoffrey F. Nuttal, *Visible Saints The Congregational Way 1640-1660* [Oxford, 1957] , 78.) These differences of opinion within the Congregational community, like the Bay clergy's growing appreciation of explicit (as opposed to implicit) covenants are but examples of a larger controversy concerning covenants within English Puritanism. Variously interpreted by separatists, Baptists and others among English dissenters, covenants fell into three distinct categories "namely, long and short explicit, and implicit covenants, though a short explicit covenant may have been regarded as implicit by some churches" Champlin Burrage, *The Church Covenant Idea Its Origins and Its Development* [Philadelphia, 1904] , 213).

53. *Ibid.*, 24-25.

54. "Mr. [Peter] Bukly to Mr. [John] Phillips from England," n.d., ca. 1642, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

55. Thomas Allen to John Cotton, November 24, 1642, MSS Hutchinson Papers, I (240), 44.

56. John Eliot to Richard Baxter, 7th of 8th, 1657, Some Unpublished Correspondence of the Reverend Richard Baxter and the Reverend John Eliot, The Apostle of the American Indians, 1656-1682, F. J. Powicke, ed., (Manchester, 1931), 25.

57. John Cotton, "The Forword Written in New England, An Apologetical Preface for the Reader of Mr. Norton's Book," in John Norton, The Answer To The Whole Set of Questions of the Celebrated Mr. William Apollonius, Pastor of the Church of Middlebury Looking toward the Resolution of Certain Controversies Concerning Church Government Now Being Agitated in England, Douglas Horton, trans., (Cambridge, 1958), 14.

58. Ibid., 26.

59. Ibid., 35-36.

60. Ibid., 39-40, 41.

61. Thomas Hooker, A Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline (London, 1648), preface .

62. Perry Miller, The New England Mind From Colony to Province (Boston, 1953), 74.

63. Cotton, "Forward," The Answer, 14.

64. Williston Walker, Creeds and Platforms, 355.

Chapter IV

1. John Winthrop (Winthrop's Journal, I, 232.) referred to the synod as "The synod called the assembly." The author of A Short Story of the Rise, Reign, and Ruine of the Antinomians, Familists, and Libertines, That Infected the Churches of New England ... (London, 1644), referred to the synod simply as "the Assembly of Ministers."

2. Winthrop's Journal, I, 246; "A Report of the Trial of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson Before the Church in Boston, 1638," Franklin B. Dexter, ed., Massachusetts Historical Society, Proceedings, ser. 2, IV (1889), 160ff.

3. Edward Johnson, Wonder-Working Providence of Sions Saviour in New England, J. Franklin Jameson, ed., (New York, 1946), 170-71.

4. Winthrop's Journal, I, 326-7.

5. John Paget, *A Defence of Church-Government Exercised in Presbyteriall Classical, and Synodall Assemblies; According to the practise of the Reformed Churches* ... (London, 1641), 29, 29-30, 30, 34-35, 62-3.

6. The conclusions here presented are a general summary of the two systems presented during the pamphlet controversy in the following tracts. See Paget, *A Defence*, and John Davenport's answer, *The Power of Congregational Churches* (London, 1672); Charles Herle *The Independency of Scripture of the Independency of Churches* ... (London, 1643) and the answer of Richard Mather and William Tompson, *A Modest and Brotherly Answer* ... (London, 1644); William Rathband, *A Brief Narration of Some Church Courses ... in New England* ... (London, 1644) and Thomas Weld's *Answer to W. R.* ... (London, 1644); Samuel Rutherford, *The Due Right of Presbyteries* ... (London, 1647), and Mather's *A Reply to Mr. Rutherford* ... (London, 1647); Robert Ballie, *A Disvasive* ... (London, 1646) and John Cotton's reply, *The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared* ... (London, 1648).

7. Davenport, *The Power of Congregational Churches*, 9.

8. Mather and Tompson, *A Modest and Brotherly Answer*, 1.

9. "Notes about Church Discipline," undated manuscript account of a discussion among the ministers in the hand of Thomas Shepard, Thomas Shepard MSS, American Antiquarian Society.

10. "Mr. [Peter] Bulkly to Mr. [John] Phillips from England," n.d., ca. 1641, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

11. *Ibid*.

12. "Notes about Church Discipline," 3 .

13. *Ibid*., 1, 2 .

14. Thomas Shepard, "To Ministers of Assembly," ca. 1643, Shepard Historical Society, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

15. John Cotton to Samuel Stone, March 27, 1638 , MSS Cotton Papers, II, 12; Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (Hartford, 1853), I, 267.

16. "The Autobiography of Thomas Shepard," Colonial Society of Massachusetts, *Transactions*, XXVII (1927-30), 386.

17. Edmund Brown to Sir Simonds' D'Ewes, September 7, 1639, Colonial Society of Massachusetts, *Transactions*, VII (1900-02), 79.

18. John Cotton to Beloved Brother, June 4, 1638, MSS Cotton Papers, II, 13.

19. "Trial of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson," 176.

20. Cotton, *Way of Congregational Churches Cleared*, 62, 63, 63, 62.

21. *Winthrop's Journal*, II, 166.

22. "A Letter of Mr. John Cotton ... to Mr. Williams," Narragansett Club, *Publications*, ser. 1, I (1866), 13-27.

23. Cotton to Williams, ca. summer, 1636, MSS Hutchinson Papers, I (240), 88-93.

24. John Cotton, *The Way of the Churches of Christ in New-England* ... (London, 1645), 107.

25. Leonard W. Levy, *Freedom of Speech and Press in Early American History Legacy of Suppression* (New York, 1963), 94.

26. Nathankel Ward, *The Simple Cobler of Aggawam*, in Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, *The Puritans*, I, 228-230.

27. *Ibid.*, 236.

28. *Records ... of Massachusetts Bay*, Nathaniel B. Shurleff, ed., (Boston, 1853-4), I, 160-61, 189.

29. John Clarke, *Ill Newes from New England: or A Narative of New-Englands Persecution* ... (London, 1652), in Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*, ser. 4, II, 6.

30. Levy, "The 'Psychology of Freedom'," *Freedom of Speech*, 313-320.

31. Cotton to Williams, MSS Hutchinson Papers, I, 88-93.

32. John Cotton, *The Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven* (London, 1644), 52, 48, 55-56.

33. Cotton, *Way of the Churches of Christ*, 106.

34. *Ibid.*, Preface.

35. See below, Chapter V, for yet another view of consociation which Cotton entertained just prior to his death.

36. Thomas Lechford, *Plaine Dealing, or News from New England*, J. Hammond Trumbull, ed., (Boston, 1867), 146, 123-4, 37.

37. Joseph B. Felt, Ecclesiastical History of New England (Boston, 1855), I, 526.

38. John Knox, "The Ministry in the Primitive Church," The Ministry in Historical Perspective, H. Richard Nieburh and Daniel D. Williams, eds., (New York, 1956), 17.

39. Lechford, Plaine Dealing, 74, 132-4.

40. Rathband, A Brief Narration, 43. This was a charge which Richard Mather all but acknowledged to be true by his silence on the subject in a manuscript treatise of rebuttal, "A Plea for the Churches of Christ," Massachusetts Historical Society.

41. Baillie, Diswassive, 128-9.

42. Lechford, Plaine Dealing, 37, 26.

43. Cotton to Williams, MSS Hutchinson Papers, I, 88-93.

44. The following observations are drawn from an analysis of 231 different examples of ministerial association (primarily ministerial meetings (160 examples) and church councils (28) to be found in a forty-year period (1632-1672) during which the collective ministry was at its most active. Winthrop's Journal and the Records ... of Massachusetts Bay have provided a large part of the data. Felt's Ecclesiastical History of New England, a thorough analysis of religious source material, is also a fruitful source of information on these meetings. Occasionally, church records have proved of some importance. Noteworthy are the Records of the First Church at Dorchester ... 1636-1674 (Boston, 1891) which contain brief reports by Richard Mather of the agenda of some of these meetings. Mather's accounts can occasionally be corroborated by the "Roxbury Land and Church Records" in the Boston Registry Department's Report (Boston, 1881) and the Salem Church Records reprinted in Daniel A. White, New England Congregationalism (Salem, 1861). Documentary examples of important deliberations undertaken by the ministers are to be found in Prince Society, The Hutchinson Papers (Albany, 1865) and in the MSS "Ecclesiastical Papers" (volumes 10 and 11) Massachusetts Archives.

45. Mather, Magnalia, I, 313.

46. Lechford, Plaine Dealing, 62.

47. Ezekiel Rogers to John Winthrop, 8th of 9th, 1647, Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections, ser. 3, II, 26.

48. Thomas Lechford, *Notebook Kept by Thomas Lechford, Esq. Lawyer in Boston, Massachusetts Bay*, Edward E. Hale, Jr. ed. (Cambridge, 1885), 50.

49. Felt, *Ecclesiastical History*, I, 526; *RMB*, III, 311, 315ff; Felt, *Ech. Hst.*, II, 346.

50. *RMB*, II, 90-91.

51. *RMB*, I, 174-5, 222, 293.

52. *Winthrop's Journal*, I, 212-13.

53. [John Davenport], *An Answer of the Elders of the Severall Churches in New England unto Nine Positions, Sent Over to Them (By divers Reverend and godly Ministers in England) to declare their Judgments therein.* (London, 1643), in [Richard Mather], *Church-Government and Church Covenant Discussed* ... (London, 1643), 53.

54. *RMB*, II, 32.

55. Councils became an important part of the New England Way after 1650 (see below, Chapter V), and were specifically ratified in the Synod of 1662. see Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 339.

56. "Conference of the Elders of Massachusetts With the Rev. Robert Lenthall ...", *Congregational Quarterly*, XIX, 234; Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Founding of Harvard College* (Cambridge, 1935), 387.

57. *Winthrop's Journal*, I, 203.

58. *Ibid.*, II, 190, 306.

59. Ibid., II, 3.

60. Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts*, 240.

61. *Winthrop's Journal*, I, 134.

62. John Cotton to William Fiennes, Lord Say and Sele, in Thomas Hutchinson, *History of Massachusetts Bay*, Lawrence Shaw Mayo, ed., I, Appendix, III, 414-417; *Winthrop's Journal*, I, 231.

63. Kenneth B. Murdock in his *Literature and Theology in Colonial New England* (New York, 1963), 89, has observed the penchant for biblical imagery and the parallel in New England literature, especially in its histories.

64. Cotton to Fiennes, 414-417; John Higginson, *The Cause of God and his People in New England* (Cambridge, 1663), 18.

65. *RMB*, IV, ii, 31.

66. John Eliot, *The Christian Commonwealth* (London, 1660), reprinted in Massachusetts Historical Soceity, *Collections*, ser. 3, IX, 153.

67. Joshua Scottow, *A Narrative of the Planting of the Massachusetts Colony, Anno 1627, with the Lord's Signal Presence the First Thirty Years* ..., Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*, ser. 4, IV, 296.

68. For standard usage of the term "elders" see the *Cambridge Platform*, in Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 189-237. That the term and its special usage were a phenomenon peculiar to the New England culture is attested to by Felt, *Ecclesiastical History*, II, 167, 180 and by John Gorham Palfrey, *History of New England* (Newton, 1876), II, 38n.

69. Johnson, *Wonder-Working Providence*, 185, 268; for an account of the popular mentality which was influenced by an accommodation of the supernatural see Edward Eggleston, *The Transit of Civilization From England to America in The Seventeenth Century* (Boston, 1959), 1-47.

70. *RMB*, I, 234.

71. Morison, *The Founding of Harvard College*, 334.

72. For a discussion of the charisma see *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York, 1958), H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., 245ff.

73. Sumner Chilton Powell, *Puritan Village The Formation of a New England Town* (New York, 1965), 167, 164.

74. John Norton, *The Answer* (Cambridge, 1958), Horton, trans., 127.

75. *Ibid*., 163.

76. *Ibid*., 14.

77. Thomas Hooker to Thomas Shepard, ca. 1647, MSS Hutchinson Papers, I (240), 99.

78. *Dorchester Church Records*, 253-4; *Winthrop's Journal*, II, 257.

79. *Ibid*., II, 278-9.

80. _Ibid_.

81. _Ibid_., II, 279; _RMB_, II, 155.

82. The three surviving manuscripts -- Wilson's "Of the Church and the Government of it," Partridge's "Modell of Church Government" and Mather's "Modell of church-government" -- are among the Mather MSS, American Antiquarian Society.

83. Wilson, "Of the Church and the Government of it," 13; Mather, "Modell of church-government", 81.

84. Walker _Creeds and Platforms_, 232, 230; Chapter XV follows the format of Cotton's _Way of the Churches of Christ_ (London, 1645), 102-110.

85. _Winthrop's Journal_, II, 279.

86. Henry Wilder Foote, "The Significance and Influence of the Cambridge Platform of 1648, Massachusetts Historical Society, _Proceedings_, LXIX (1947-50), 98.

87. "Body of Liberties," sections 63, 95.4, 95.21. The "Body of Liberties" are to be found in William H. Whitmore, _A Bibliographic Sketch of the Laws of the Massachusetts Colony from 1630 to 1686_ (Boston, 1890).

88. ________ to Richard Mather, n.d. but ca. 1644, MSS Mather Papers, I, 3, Boston Public Library.

89. Mather, "Modell of church-government," 49; Cambridge Platform in Walker, _Creeds and Platforms_, 220.

90. Richard Mather , "An Answer of the Elders to certayne doubts and objections against sundry passages in the Platform of Discipline agreed upon by the late Synod, sent from some churches and particular brethren to the most Hononred General Court, or the Secretary, and by order of the Court commended to the Elders for Answer," Richard Mather MSS, American Antiquarian Society, 2, 4, 5, 17, 28, 38, 39, 41.

91. See _Platform,_ Chapter 5, sec. 2.

92. "Exceptions against some things in the Synod at Cambridge. 1649," MSS Cotton Papers, III, 10.

Chapter V

1. Richard Mather , _Church-Government ... an Answer of the Elders To two and thirty Questions_, 8-9.

2. "Conference of the Elders of Massachusetts with the Rev. Robert Lenthall," Congregational Quarterly, XIX, 237.

3. Mather, Church-Government, 12, 20.

4. Ibid., 20, 22.

5. John Norton, The Answer (Cambridge, 1958), Horton, trans., 61.

6. Increase Mather, The First Principles of New England ... (Cambridge, 1675), 6.

7. Williston Walker, Creeds and Platforms (Boston, 1960), 250ff.

8. Thomas Allen to John Cotton, November 24, 1642, MSS Hutchinson Papers, I (240), 44.

9. Thomas Parker to ______, December 17, 1643, Charles A. Briggs, American Presbyterianism; Its Origins and Early History, Together with an Appendix of Letters and Documents, Many of Which have Recently been Discovered (New York, 1185), appendix, xxiv.

10. Norton, The Answer, 20.

11. Richard Mather, "Modell of church-government," 61, 63.

12. Joseph B. Felt, Ecclesiastical History (Boston, 1855), I, 141.

13. Ibid., II, 152.

14. Salem Church Records, Typescript copy, Essex Institute, Salem, Massachusetts, 77-78.

15. Reverend John Fiske's Notebook, Massachusetts Historical Society, Proceedings, ser. 2, XII (1897-99), 319-320.

16. Edmund S. Morgan, The Puritan Family, Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth Century New England (New York, 1966), 92-95.

17. Cotton Mather quoted in Ibid., 182.

18. Richard Mather quoted in Ibid., 140.

19. Bernard Bailyn's provocative Education in the Forming of American Society (New York, 1960) suggests the state of knowledge and scholarship on the subject of "declension" and cultural decay, 74-75. Louis B. Wright, Culture on the Moving Frontier (New York, 1961), Chapter I, "The

Colonial Struggle Against Barbarism" touches on the problem. See also Gilbert Chase, America's Music From the Pilgrim to the present (New York, 1955) Chapter 2, "New England Reformers" for a fascinating account of "declension" as it appeared in congregational singing.

20. Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England, Acts of the Commissioners of the United Colonies of New England, David Pulsifer, ed. (Boston, 1859), II, 157; Darrett B. Rutman, Winthrop's Boston (Chapel Hill, 1965), 131-2.

21. RMB, III, 424.

22. Ibid., 331.

23. Ibid., IV, i, 417.

24. Ibid., IV, i, 421, 424 445; IV, ii, 342, 345, 469.

25. Felt, Ecclesiastical History, II, 165.

26. Ibid., 318.

27. For histories of these congregations see Henry M. Burt, The First Century of the History of Springfield (Springfield, 1898), I; Edward E. Bourne, The History of Wells and Kennebunk from the Earliest Settlement to 1820 (Portland, 1875); Charles H. Bell, History of the Town of Exeter New Hampshire (Exeter, 1888); Timothy Alden, Jr. An Account of the Several Religious Societies in Portsmouth New Hampshire from their first establishment (Boston, 1808); George Falsom, History of Sacco and Biddeford (Saco, 1830).

28. RMB, II, 159, 203, 237, 250, 276.

29. Ibid., IV, i, 22.

30. Ecclesiastical MSS, I(10), 84, Massachusetts Archives.

31. RMB, IV,i, 156-7.

32. Ibid., IV, i, 194, 215, 313, 151.

33. Ibid., IV, i, 328.

34. Ecclesiastical MSS, I (10), 200a.

35. John Cotton to Sir Richard Saltonstall, n.d. but ca. 1651, Thomas Hutchinson, A Collection of Original Papers Relative to the History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay (Boston, 1769), II, 127-129.

36. Cotton Mather, Magnalia Christi Americana (Hargford, 1852), I, 272; Larzer Ziff, John Cotton, (Princeton, 1962), 254; John Cotton, The Covenant of Grace ... Whereunto are added: Certain Queries tending to Accomodation between the Presbyterian and Congregationall Churches (London, 1655), 6.

37. "Testimony and Counsel of the Reverend John Higginson, of Guilford," Connecticut Historical Society, Collections, II (1870), 99.

38. John Eliot, Communion of Churches or the Divine Management of Gospel Churches by the Ordinance of Council ... (Cambridge, 1665), 1.

39. Ibid., 4.

40. Ibid., 21, 12.

41. Ibid., 4-5, 8, 24-29, 33.

42. Eliot, Christian Commonwealth, 33; Richard Baxter to John Eliot, n.d. but ca. 1667, Powicke, Some Unpublished Correspondence of the Reverend Richard Baxter and the Reverend John Eliot, the Apostle of the American Indians, 27; Eliot to Baxter, January 10, 1667/68, Ibid., 28-29.

43. "Correspondence of John Woodbridge, Jr. and Richard Baxter," Raymond P. Stearns, ed., New England Quarterly, X (1937), Woodbridge to Baxter, March, 1671, 578.

44. Baxter to Woodbridge, Autumn, 1671 , Ibid., 580.

45. Felt, Ecclesiastical History, II, 190.

46. See A Disputation Concerning Church-Members and their Children ... (London, 1659), in Walker, Creeds and Platforms, 289-90.

47. Felt, Ecclesiastical History, II, 275.

48. RMB, IV, ii, 38; Ecclesiastical MSS, I (10), 193b, 194, 194a.

49. Walker, Creeds and Platforms, 266.

50. See "Propositions Agreed upon by the Assembly at Boston to be discussed on 10th of June with Mr. Davenport's Judgements," MSS Mather Papers, I, 23, Boston Public Library; "A Reply to the 7 Propositions continued by the Synod sitting at Boston, June 10, 1662, by John Davenport," in John Davenport MSS, American Antiquarian Society.

51. Walker, Creeds and Platforms, 268; Isabel M. Calder, The New Haven Colony (New Haven, 1934), 104.

52. Alonzo H. Quint, "The Origin of Ministerial Associations in New England," Congregational Quarterly, II (1860), 204.

53. Walker, Creeds and Platforms, 339.

54. Increase Mather to John Davenport, October 21, 1662, Thomas Hutchinson, The History of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts Bay, Lawrence Shaw Mayo, ed. (Cambridge, 1936), I, 192n.

55. "A plaine Proposall of the Dissenting messengers of the Churches assembled in the Synode, about the resolution of the first Question touching the subject of Baptisme. To the Honored General Court," transcript of original among "State Papers" by David Pulsifer, in "Synod of 1662 -- MSS Documents," Beinecke Library, Yale University, 6.

56. "The Judgement of the Dissenting Brethren of the Synode concerning resolution of the Questions propounded by the Generall Court, to the Reverend Elders and messingers of the Churches in this Jurisdiction ..." in "Synod of 1662 -- MSS Documents," Beinecke Library, Yale University, 45.

57. Ibid., 38.

58. Ibid., 49.

59. "To the much Honnoured General Court of the Massachusetts Colony now sigging in Boston", "Synod of 1662 -- MSS Documents," Beinecke Library, Yale University, 62.

60. John Davenport, Another Essay (Cambridge, 1663), 54, 56-58.

61. Richard Mather and Johnathan Mitchell, A Defence of the Answer and Argument of the Synod ... (Cambridge, 1664), 101.

62. John Allin, Animadversions Upon the Antisynodalia Americana (Cambridge, 1664), 5.

63. Ibid., 3, 5, 8-9.

64. John Davenport, "A Vindication of the Treatise entitled Another Essay ...", Davenport MSS, American Antiquarian Society.

65. John Davenport, "The third Essay containing a Reply to the Answer unto the other Essay ...", 3, Davenport MSS, American Antiquarian Society.

66. Ibid., 7a.

67. Manuscripts -- 61.6, #3, Massachusetts Historical Society.

68. John Higginson, *The Cause of God and his People in New England* (Cambridge, 1663), 15-16, 18.

69. *RMB*, IV, ii, 20, 34-5, 44, 118.

70. Felt, *Ecclesiastical History*, II, 303-04.

71. See, for example, *Records of the First Church at Dorchester* (Boston, 1891), 50-51.

72. John Hull, "Some Passages of God's Providence about myself and in relation to myself ...," American Antiquarian Society, *Transactions and Collections*, III, 198, 209, 211-212.

73. Hutchinson, *History ... of Massachusetts*, I, 193-4.

74. Hamilton Andrews Hill, *History of the Old South Church (Third Church) Boston, 1669-1884* (Boston, 1890), 77.

75. For a detailed description of the dissenters' point of view see Ecclesiastical Papers, I, Boston Public Library.

76. Felt, *Ecclesiastical History*, II, 446.

77. Hill, *History of Old South Church*, 87.

78. *RMB*, IV, ii, 489.

79. *Ibid.*, 492.

80. Thomas Shepard, *Eye-Salve Or A Watch-Word From Our Lord Jesus Christ unto his Church* ... (Cambridge, 1673), 1, 10, 26, 28, 29.

Chapter VI

1. See Felt, *Ecclesiastical History*, II, 167, 180; Palfrey, *History of New England*, II, 38n.

2. MSS Mather Papers, II, 74, Boston Public Library.

3. *Ibid.*, II, 36.

4. William Hubbard, *General History of New England* (Cambridge, 1815), 609.

5. John Josselyn, *An Account of Two Voyages to New England* (London, 1674), 180; statement by John Higginson Sr., MS Mather Papers, II, 18.

6. *Hutchinson Papers*, III (242), 328, Massachusetts Archives; "Early Suffolk Records," Massachusetts Historical Society, *Proceedings*, ser. 2, XII (1897099), 223.

7. Joshua Scottow, *Old Men's Tears for their own Declensions* ... (London, 1691), 9.

8. *Ibid*., 327, 326.

9. Clifford K. Shipton, "The New England Clergy of the 'Glacial Age'," Colonial Society of Massachusetts, *Transactions*, XXXII (1933), 47.

10. Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century* (New York, 1964), 138ff.

11. Shipton, "The New England Clergy ...", 30.

12. MSS Mather Papers, IV, 1.

13. John Woodbridge to Richard Baxter, 1671, "Correspondence of John Woodbridge, Jr., and Richard Baxter, Raymond P. Stearns, ed., *New England Quarterly* X(1937), 576-7.

14. *Ibid*., 577, 574; Simon Bradstreet to Baxter, February 5, 1671/72, *Ibid*., 583; Woodbridge to Baxter, October 14, 1669, *Ibid*., 565. In his *Delinquent Saints, Disciplinary Action in the Early Congregational Churches of Massachusetts* (New York, 1956), Emil Oberhelzer suggests that Baptists were considerably more worrisome to the churches than the Quakers. Working with incomplete records of twenty churches (some of which begin late in the century and in which, in one case at least, discipline cases were omitted), Oberholzer found all but one of the eight Quaker conversions in the Salem church (the exception was Boston's First Church) and 75 cases of apostacy by Baptist converts in the seventeenth century (p. 91, 96). These figures are no doubt disproportionately low considering the fragmentary nature of the evidence. The tendency among Congregational church members to join in "purer" Baptist fellowships though generally latent during this period can nevertheless be considered as part of a broader orientation towards pure and independent congregations of adult saints. With the Great Awakening in the 1740's, however, this purist's orientation came into its own creating a movement among separates or "strict congregationalists" in New England. Triggered by a renewed concern for purified churches composed only of those who had some religious experience of their salvation, this orientation was responsible not only for "new light" strict congregations but for approximately twenty Congregational churches organized in Massachusetts between 1740 and 1750 which "grew at length into Baptist churches" (Joseph S. Clark quoted by

S. Leroy Blake, *The Separates or Strict Congregationalists of New England* [Boston, 1902], 133).

15. Solomon Stoddard, "Commonplace Book," 1660-1664, Weidner Library, Harvard University.

16. See MS Church Records, Northampton, Massachusetts, items dated 10-29-1668, 12-16-1668/69, 11-12-1668/69, 12-2-1668/69, Forbes Library, Northampton, Massachusetts.

17. Solomon Stoddard, *The Doctrine of the Instituted Churches* (London, 1700), 25.

18. *Ibid*., 7-8.

19. *Ibid*., 5-6.

20. *Ibid*., 29-30.

21. *Ibid*., 11.

22. See Benjamin Trumbull, *A Complete History of Connecticut Civil and Ecclesiastical* ... (New Haven, 1818), I, 484.

23. Williston Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 502.

24. Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (New Haven, 1852), I, 242.

25. Alonzo H. Quint, "The Origins of Ministerial Associations in New England," *Congregational Quarterly*, II (1860), 207.

26. Mather, II *Magnalia*, 271-72.

27. Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 479-80.

28. Mather, *Magnalia*, I, 555.

29. *Ibid*., II, 271.

30. *Ibid*., 272.

31. See Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 440ff.

32. *Ibid*., 487.

33. *Ibid*.

34. *Ibid*., 488.

35. Samuel Mather on the "Proposals of 1705," 5, in Increase Mather MSS, American Antiquarian Society.

36. Walker, Creeds and Platforms, 492.

37. George Allan Cook, John Wise, Early American Democrat (New York, 1952), 107.

38. Ibid., 107-08.

39. Ibid., 136-38.

40. Ibid., 136; John Wise, A Vindication of the Government of New England Churches (1717) (Gainsville, 1958), 36, 37-39, 40.

41. Ibid., 11, 12.

42. Ibid., 45, 60, 67.

43. Ibid., 69, 88, 89.

44. Ibid., 25, 102, 102-04.

Epilogue

1. Ernst Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches (New York, 1960), II, 659.

2. Ibid., 661, 660.

Bibliographic Essay

New England has been ably served by her historians and antiquarians, yet a fair portion of her history is still to be found in manuscript sources which have gone unexplored. Such sources are vital to a study such as the present one. No historian has done more for our understanding of New England Puritanism than Perry Miller whose Orthodoxy in Massachusetts (Boston, 1959) and two-volume The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century (Boston 1939), and From Colony to Province (Boston, 1953), the author has found indispensible. Professor Miller, working in the genre of the history of ideas, has accectuated the important similarities between certain English nonconformists -- notably William Ames -- and the Bay ministers. But having found that a primary reason for ministerial association was the need to clarify doctrine and polity, the present author found it necessary to rely in part upon sources other than those which are the strength of Professor Miller's work -- namely the published ministerial literature produced by a prolific ministry between 1640 and 1650. Relatively little was published by the clergy until the Puritan revolution in England, however, thus issues and controversies among the ministers during the 1630's are to be found in ministerial letters, notes, manuscript treatises, unpublished sermons and notebooks. The clergy's first detailed description of the New England Way -- the "Modell of Church and Civill Power" -- even though printed by Roger Williams, was of little value until a comparison of the extant portion of the manuscript with William's rendition (which he presented in small portions for purposes of refutation) demonstrated that the document was not quoted out of context by Williams and was complete as presented in the Bloudy Tenet of Persecution. The present author's treatment of the ministerial debates during the Antinomian controversy depends in large part upon the excellent material to be found among John Cotton's extant papers. One finds, for example, the basic issues outlined in an exchange of letters between Cotton and Thomas Shepard, while subsequent letters from Cotton indicate that he struggled to maintain a theological identity because he feared for his soul. Likewise Shepard's doctrine of conversion is to be found not only in published treatises but also in letters and an agonizing dialogue with himself conducted via the medium of a private diary. Other ministers found themselves sufficiently unsettled by the events of the late 1630's to preach sermons (available, again, only in manuscript form) and construct arguments in their notebooks. By the 1640's the more protracted differences were glossed over and thus not so easily surmised from a reading of those published treatises meant to demonstrate to English Christendom the uniqueness of the New England Way. By the same token, the supposed agreement which underwrote the Cambridge Platform becomes something less than perfect if a comparison of ministerial manuscripts and letters is undertaken. While the facts of ministerial association can be deduced by a perusal of such basic sources as Winthrop's Journal History of Massachusetts Bay, James Kendall Hosmer, ed. (New York, 1909), the Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., (Boston, 1853-4), the Body of Liberties and the colony's Laws and Liberties, it is in such documents as the "Modell" and in the papers apropos to the debates on the nature and extent of collective clerical authority to be found among Thomas Shepard's papers and a comparison of those manuscript drafts of the Cambridge Platform with the published document which give some idea of the differences among the ministers and the extent to which classical pretensions were missing from the published platform.

Having established the facts of a clerical association and the areas of ministerial debate, the present author has been able to make more complete use of those treatises attributed to Mather, Davenport, and Norton whose titles and internal evidence indicates were dependent in large part upon the clerical matrix. On the other hand, being aware of some fundamental areas of disagreement between Cotton, Hooker, and the lesser known clergy, the author has been less ready to find in their particular treatises the quintessence of the New England Way which is so frequently deduced by historians from the works of these luminaries. The recent publication of John Norton's Latin treatise The Answer To The Whole Set of Questions of ... Mr. William Apollonius ..., Douglas Horton, trans., (Cambridge, 1958) has provided the author with an important document, for Norton's views, expressly ratified by a majority of the clergy, should be recognized as an important exposition of church practices and doctrine which was more authoritarian and less evangelical than what has assumed to be normative for the New England Way.

Among the papers of those pivotal figures who helped shape the clerical mind (either by forceful arguments or in their dissent) the author has found the following especially useful. The great bulk of John Cotton's extant papers and many Mather manuscripts are on deposit in the "Prince Collection" of the Boston Public Library. The Thomas Shepard papers in the possession of the Thomas Shepard Historical Society are deposited in the Houghton Library, Harvard University. A few scattered manuscripts of Peter Bulkley are also in Houghton Library. The Massachusetts Historical Society has an invaluable collection of miscellaneous manuscripts, including a copy of Shepard's diary and some papers of Richard Mather. The American Antiquarian Society in Worcester contains large collections of papers including those of Richard, Increase, and Cotton Mather, some Shepard material, and an important, English-period treatise attributed to John Davenport. Some Davenport material, together with a series of documents relating to the Synod of 1662, are to be found in the Beinecke Library, Yale University. Finally, the Ecclesiastical Manuscripts and the Hutchinson Papers deposited in the Massachusetts Archives contain useful materials, including documents exchanged by the colony's government and "the elders."

An important influence on the New England Way was, of course, the English period of the Bay clergy. In assessing the primary influences which were to affect the future Bay ministers the author has found William Haller's The Rise of Puritanism (New York, 1957) especially helpful. Haller's exhaustive analysis of the preachers' tracts suggests that the elucidation of "faith" in tract and sermon was perhaps the chief objective of a large and important segment of the clergy in Stuart England. But whereas Haller argues that the "brotherhood" was unorganized, the present author finds a considerable degree of organization in ministerial associations. How far the ideals of the Classis Movement were carried over into Cotton's generation is a matter of conjecture for there is precious little material on the English period of the Bay clergy. But the close relationship between early classicists like John Dod, Arthur Hildersham, John Ward, Richard Rogers, and William Perkins and the Bay clergy suggests that the basic foundations of the New England Way were laid by Cartwright's presbyterianism and altered by a younger generation who found in William Ames a theologian who more clearly articulated the evangelical dimension of church polity to be found in the general equation between faith and fellowship in the English parishes. Little work has been done on William Ames, although Douglas Horton's translation of three short treatises on Ames (William Ames Cambridge, 1965) has been of some help in assessing this important thinker's influence on a wide segment of English nonconformity which never embraced

Independency. While Chapter I is largely introductory, the author has tried to avoid too narrow an approach to English nonconformity and to suggest the broad patterns which, more than a simple intellectual commitment of an undetermined number of English ministers to the works of Ames, were the bases upon which the New England Way was established.

In assessing the New England Way the author has tried to observe the interaction of faith, the ministers' intellectual tradition, and the historical facts which combined to create the Bay's ecclesiastical polity. Anyone using this approach must recognize in Alan Simpson's Puritanism in Old and New England (Chicago, 1955) a volume dedicated to an understanding of polity and the dynamic Puritan faith. Professor Simpson has wisely admonished that "no superstructure of logic ought to be allowed to mask that turmoil of feeling" which was at the heart of the Puritan faith (P.21). Professor Simpson's statement sums up the author's differences with Edmund S Morgan's important volume Visible Saints, The History of a Puritan Idea (New York, 1963). While Professor Morgan would suggest that by 1640 the Bay churches had been converted to congregations of the visibly faithful, the present author sees in the theological debates of the late 1630's a nascent cynicism about this new departure and an attempt by a majority of the clergy to mute the ideal as applied in the congregations. Be that as it may, Professor Morgan has conclusively demonstrated the extent to which the Bay polity, by the late 1630's was a conscious attempt at a new departure in the definition and actual organization of the Bay churches. In a very short time, however, the ministers discovered that logic was no mask for an experienced faith, although it might serve as a substitute.

No secondary work on Puritanism has touched upon the question of ministerial association or questions of clerical organization, the single exception being Raymond P. Stearns' Congregationalism in the Dutch Netherlands (Chicago, 1940). It is the author's hope that The Reverend Elders can, in some measure, illuminate this important aspect of English and New England Puritanism.